

**IN
THE
DARK**

DONALD RICHBERG

204

Rose Walker

IN THE DARK

By the same author

THE SHADOW MEN

A ROMANCE OF "BIG BUSINESS"

IN THE DARK

BY
DONALD RICHBERG

Author of
"The Shadow Men"



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INTO each man's life, with its dull, drab days and long gray years, may come a few scarlet hours . . . wayside hazards of adventurous living or one glowing epoch when man and maid stake all on the splendid risk of love. Into my humdrum life there came a woman, fleeing from a dubious past, and for a time my days teemed with venture and romance, that brought into the gloomy streets of a fog-hung city a radiance of the joy of living that—for me—clings to them still.

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CHAPTER I

THE NIGHT SHE CAME

THE room was very dark and still. As I sat up in bed I could hear nothing except the creaking of the window shade. Then, from a neighboring yard came the sharp bark of a dog, breaking the tense silence as though a sudden warning of impending danger. I raised my hand nervously to turn on the electric light over my head. As my fingers fumbled along the bracket, seeking for the switch, a hand came out of the blackness and seized my wrist. My body became rigid. My arm stiffened and became immovable. I stopped breathing and listened for the breath of that Other One in the room. I could not hear a sound. The suspense became intolerable. Slowly I moved my

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hand downward. Then, with a convulsive burst of energy, I tore at the fingers which clasped my arm. Another hand came out of the blackness and seized me by the throat. The struggle for mastery commenced in the silence and in the dark.

I did not dare to cry out for fear of arousing Her—that soft-voiced stranger, sleeping at the other end of the apartment. My antagonist seemed also to fear noise. He fought viciously but without a word, without unnecessary violence. His knee pressed into my chest. His breath—at least he breathed—he was human—his breath felt hot on my cheeks. Slowly, deliberately he gained control of my writhing muscles. At last he spoke:

“Lie still! Or—”

I ceased struggling.

“My name is Curlew,” he said. “Do you understand?”

He was the man across the hall, my neighbor, whom, in six months, I had never seen. No, I did not understand. I said so.

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He laughed, low and incredulously.

"She knows," he said.

"Who is she?" said I.

"You ought to know. You brought her here."

"I do not know," I whispered. "What is her name?"

He laughed again.

"We will ask her." His voice shook, as if with anger.

"Don't you disturb her," I said fiercely. "She is sick. Leave her alone."

A terrible dread seized me that this violent man would arouse her, that slender, fainting woman whom I had half-carried up the last, long flight of stairs.

"I don't know you," I whispered. "I don't know her. But *I* found her—not you—and you leave her alone!"

A gust of wind blew the curtain aside and a bar of moonlight fell for an instant across the bed. I saw a gaunt, bony face within a foot of my own. Two deep-set gray eyes glared

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at me and then slipped back into the shadows.

"Where did you find her?" he asked slowly. I said nothing.

"Where did you find her?" He dug his nails into my imprisoned arms.

"You have no right to ask," I answered, in desperation trying a random shot.

His grip relaxed in a momentary shudder.

"Then you know," he whispered.

"I know nothing." Which was the truth.

Several minutes passed without a word from my companion. Then he spoke rapidly.

"If I turn on the light, will you promise to lie quiet?"

"Yes."

He released me and switched on the light. Then he tiptoed across the room, closed the door and the open window and drew down the shades on both windows. He was a man of unusual size and, as I could readily testify, of extraordinary strength. His movements showed the alert nervous energy of an athlete

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in training but his strong thoughtful face contradicted any suggestion that he might be a professional. In fact my first guess was that he was a mining engineer, whose outdoor work had maintained in him the active strength of youth, despite his apparent age of at least forty years. My guess proved later to be correct.

“Mr. Winston,” he said, “I have led a strange, hard life but there has not been much in it of which I’m ashamed. My reason for being here to-night is entirely honorable, but I didn’t dare to risk a conventional effort to find out what I must know. Understand another thing,” he interjected fiercely, “I don’t lie. I may not tell you everything but what I say will be the truth.”

“I believe you,” I answered promptly, for I did.

“That woman whom you brought here was, and is, very dear to me—dearer than anything in the world. Years ago I lost her, lost every trace of her through my own act. Details don’t matter. I left town suddenly; was

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gone for some years; returned. She had disappeared. I've searched for her everywhere. I find her in your apartment. How does she come to be here?"

"I can't give you any information."

His face lost its look of terrible anxiety and hardened with bitterness.

"To be absolutely candid, I know almost nothing about her. But she is in distress for which I'm not in the least degree responsible. Perhaps you are."

He shook his head.

"Then why didn't you ring the doorbell and ask for her early this evening?"

"I'm not telling you all," he said, "but I mean her no harm."

"You haven't acted like a man who meant well by her."

"You know more than you pretend," he accused. "You said I had no right to ask."

"If that was true, then you are not going to be answered."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," he snarled,

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raising his voice, "if you won't talk I'll have to talk to her. I wanted to save her that pain if—if—some things were true."

"Don't you dare to disturb her," I shouted. "She's sick, I tell you. Let her alone."

As he backed slowly toward the door I sat up in bed and shook a protesting hand at him.

"You talk about caring for her! Leave her alone until to-morrow. Let her sleep in peace."

"And find her gone in the morning," he sneered, "after years of searching. That's not Jim Curlew's way. I'll see her now!"

He jerked out the key as he opened the door and as he slammed it behind him I heard the lock click. I sprang across the room and, dragging open a bureau drawer, pulled a loaded revolver from its hiding place. Luckily a closet in my room had been built as a passageway to the little hall that led to Her room. Pushing through the hanging garments I followed close upon Curlew. The door was open!

I plunged into the darkness, pressed the light-switch and disclosed the blinking Curlew stand-

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ing in the center of the room. She was not there. My roving glance noted the disordered bed, its counterpane turned back and blankets rumpled, where She had evidently lain down fully clad. Poor girl! She had probably fallen asleep despite her nervous fears of the house of a stranger and, wakening at the sound of our angry voices, fled terror-stricken from her brief refuge. Would she have left a word for me? There was a little pencil by the candle on the table at the head of the bed. A white slip near it caught my eye. I moved toward it cautiously.

"She must have heard us," I said idly, to distract Curlew, slipping my weapon ostentatiously into my left hand.

"Yes," he answered dully.

My hand dropped on the slip.

"What's that?" he demanded, stepping toward me. Happily the bed was between us.

I dropped my eyes to the slip and read: "To-morrow evening eight same place."

A long arm reached across the bed and

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gripped my left wrist putting the revolver out of service.

"Give me that note," said Curlew, "or by—"

As he jerked me forward I had just sense enough to thrust the crumpled paper into my mouth. I struck out wildly with my right hand. Curlew seized it and, utterly disregarding the menacing weapon in my left, tore the clenched fingers open. I swallowed convulsively.

"What did you do with it?" he cried. I stood up and, feeling safe from immediate assault, grew calmer.

"Mr. Curlew!" I said, walking away a step or two, "you have broken into my home and attacked me twice within the last half hour. I don't know what it means or if you think you are out on the frontier, but I know that the law will protect me if I shoot you down and I give you just thirty seconds to get out."

I raised the revolver and I meant what I said. I wouldn't have killed him, but I should have shot him in the arm or leg without hesi-

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tation, had he moved toward me. With a curious wandering of attention I speculated as to whether a bullet would go through and break a long mirror just behind him. He hesitated, flickering glimpses of deep, struggling emotions quivering through his harsh features. Then he retreated. Nothing was said until he turned the knob of the front door.

"Mr. Winston," he almost pleaded, "this is a terrible blow to me. I thought I had found her. I've searched so long! Won't you help me to see her? I'm sorry I lost control of myself. Of course, you're quite right. But I don't mean her any harm."

"If I should ever see her again, of course I'll tell her about you. If *she* thinks you mean no harm, why shouldn't she see you? I know where to find you."

"But she may have been deceived about me," he answered. "She may think I've done something I haven't. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I understand." The man's earnest-

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ness affected me. "I'll tell her that she may be mistaken—if I see her."

"Thank you," he said simply. "Let me apologize again for everything. Good-night."

My first thought as the door closed behind him was: How did he get in? The unlocked door upon the front porch was the immediate answer. The porch being common to both he had simply walked out of his door, stepped over the dividing railing and entered at my door. As I strolled out idly across this porch the lights flashed on in his living room. I glanced in and saw him walking up and down, hands clenched and face distorted. Now and then he paused and, gripping his lined forehead with both hands, seemed to be trying to press a binding pain from his temples. The man was plainly in mental agony. He looked like a decent sort. Perhaps I had done wrong. I went in and sat down before the cold hearth to think it over.

CHAPTER II

HOW SHE CAME

IN the first place I had encountered Her through purest chance. As my sister, who lived with me and attended to the domestic details of my humdrum existence, was in the East, visiting friends, I had dined late at the Club after a hard day at the office. Feeling fagged and yet sleepless I left the suburban train at a distant station so as to enjoy a roundabout walk through the park. Striding briskly along an unfrequented path I noticed casually on a bench, almost invisible in the shadows, the drooping figure of a woman. I had passed on but a few steps when a dull thud brought me up short and turning back I saw that the slender form had slipped from its resting place. With a momentary wish that it was not a mere dis-

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gusting "drunk," followed by a fervent hope that it was nothing more serious, I hurried to the woman's aid. She struggled to her knees as I put my hands under her shoulders and whispered something about, "all right—" "sorry—" Her voice shook but there was no intoxicated blur in the words and I helped her back to a sitting posture on the bench with mingled relief and pity.

"What is the matter?" I said, after a moment's silence. "Can I help you in any way?"

I could barely see her face in the dim light, but her dull eyes suddenly glistened with tears. She tried to speak several times before I caught the faint whisper, "No food."

For one discreditable moment some recollection flashed across of the "starving game" worked by unscrupulous women on impressionable men. Then decent common sense returned. No fraud would choose such a lonesome pathway and I didn't believe anyone could act such a part with the terrible effectiveness of this woman.

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“Do you think you could walk?” I asked.

“I’ll try,” she said bravely. Then she added vaguely—“why?”

“We must get where there’s food,” I said with attempted cheeriness.

For a moment I thought she was going to faint, then she stiffened her neck and rose unsteadily.

“Excuse me,” I murmured, slipping an arm under her shoulders. Then I remembered my first thought on touching her. Her arms were like thin cloth hung on strips of cardboard. I almost feared to lift her up. It seemed that she would bend and break under the strain.

We walked very slowly and without exchanging a word along the winding path until we emerged from the park on the street that led to my house. Then she paused a moment and raising her drooping head with obvious effort she asked:

“Where are you taking me?”

“I’m perfectly willing to take you anywhere you wish,” I answered in some embarrassment,

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“but I think a public restaurant would—well it wouldn’t be comfortable—for you, I mean. I should like to have you come with me to my house. Unfortunately my sister is away—I’m all alone—it may seem unusual to ask you—but this whole situation is a bit unusual. Do you mind?”

She looked at me unsteadily for a moment with pitiful eyes that strove so hard to be brave. Then she touched my arm ever so lightly with a shaking hand and half whispered:

“If you are all alone, and will understand—I think you do—I’ll go! I couldn’t meet a woman!”

“There’s not even a servant there,” I said. “And I do understand. I hope that you understand me also.”

Neither on the poorly lighted street, nor in the glaring hall of the apartment building did I meet even a casual acquaintance, for which good fortune we smiled feebly at each other as we faced the long stairway that led to my third-floor rooms. On the first landing she

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swayed perceptibly. I suppose I unconsciously hastened her in shamefaced fear of an encounter with a neighbor, who, neighborlike, would be sure to misunderstand. Without giving time for protest I slipped my arm down to her yielding waist and practically carried her unassisted the balance of the way. A flitting shade of terror crossed her face but I silenced a half-formed remonstrance with a most businesslike, "Please!" Once inside the hall door I released my hold and she followed me with uncertain steps into the living room where I set to work immediately to make the place comfortable. I purposely paid no attention to her until I had lit the lamps, stuffed kindling and paper into the fireplace, and drawn a heavy, padded chair up in front of the struggling blaze. Then I said, rather brusquely:

"Now, please make yourself as comfortable as you can while I investigate the kitchen resources."

She was standing near the doorway, supporting herself with one arm thrown across the

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back of a chair. She was peering perplexedly around the room, evidently trying to appraise its owner's character from his surroundings and at the same time striving to adjust her own presence there with her usual notions of the fitness of things. So absorbed was she in forcing her dulled senses to the task that she failed utterly to hear me and as her roaming glance chanced to focus on my expectant face the color rushed into her thin cheeks and she closed her eyes in complete and charming confusion.

“Please”—she stammered.

“Please—sit down,” I finished her phrase. “I’ll return immediately,” and I tramped out to the kitchen in equal embarrassment.

For the first time I realized that in honestly offering sympathetic aid to an unknown and unseen person I had incidentally achieved a sudden intimacy with a most attractive woman. Even romantic interest would not invest her with beauty. She could not be fairly described as pretty. But she had a wistful sweetness in

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her delicate features, a soft, fragile appearance and truly lovely, deep-set gray eyes that gazed upon all things with vague wonderment. The result of my first exploring look was an immediate disturbing sense of appeal that stirred the male desire to comfort and befriend—an ambition, born perhaps in a wish to rule that speedily becomes a desire to serve. I cursed myself as a susceptible ass and kicked open the pantry door.

From the pleasant disorder to which I had soon reduced my sister's neatly concealed food supplies, I extracted a can of string beans, a jar of preserves, bread, butter, cold meat—in short enough viands for a small gang of harvesters. These I arranged in unappetizing confusion upon a large Japanese tray, added a few utensils and, in a moment of happy thought, a glass of water, and bore triumphantly into the front room.

My visitor had removed her hat, a simple thing of blue felt, ornamented with a single drooping feather of the same shade, and was

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leaning back in the big chair, her thin-soled, muddy little shoes thrust toward the warming logs. Her hair—in its well-ordered confusion dispelling cynical doubts as to its origin—was brushed back loosely from the forehead, and the firelight wove into the rich brown masses glints of copper fire that melted my carefully congealed attitude in one glowing moment.

“Oh, it’s so comfortable,” she murmured, looking up in lazy content. “What a lot of trouble you’ve taken!”

She started to rise.

“Now you stay right where you are,” I commanded with deceptive brusqueness. I put the tray on a small side table and dragged the whole affair clumsily across the room.

“Remember,” I advised, “the doctors say one must eat very little and very slowly after—going without food for a time. I didn’t know what you would like, so I brought all this stuff in, but you mustn’t eat very much of it. By George! I forgot. You ought to have some coffee, the first thing—something hot. Just

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peck at these while I make some coffee. I can recommend my coffee."

Chattering absurdly, I overbore her remonstrances and hurried out of the room. It was really lucky I had forgotten the coffee. I couldn't have stayed and watched her eat. When I saw her eyes glitter and her thin little hands actually shaking in nervous anticipation, a lump came right up in my throat and a foolish sort of prickly feeling in the back of my eyes and—well, I simply had to leave the room.

When I came back with the coffee and with, I hoped, a certain feeble self-control, she was eating cold tongue and buttered bread as though it were grilled prairie chicken on toast.

"One lump or two?" I inquired.

"Just one," she said, with dainty decisiveness.

And I loved the way she said it. Sounds silly. But I did. There was no use deceiving myself. If I deceived myself I would be caught

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off guard and surely do or say something inexcusable. So I said to myself frankly: "Look here, Winston, the romantic element of this thing has got into your blood. It has intoxicated you. You're falling in love with an absolutely unknown girl at the rate of three hundred feet a second. The affair isn't as deep as you think it is now, and if you don't get hold of your boot straps and pull back—you're going to hit bottom suddenly with a crash. Now hang on, old man." So I hung on. But I knew I was falling just the same. The boot straps simply gave me a feeling of self-control. I didn't really have any inhibitions except inherited instincts, inbred conventionalities and fear—fear that I might offend—and for that fear I was truly grateful, for the other protections were like tissue-paper screens. They helped keep me cool but if the flames ever touched them, they were gone!

Of course, I must have given myself away, a little. Now and then she glanced at me in

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a troubled way. But, womanlike, she felt her power to check as well as to inspire and, womanlike, feeling secure, she enjoyed a sense of risk.

We talked very little, but when she finally laid her knife and fork primly across her plate and leaned back with a little sigh of comfort, I was loathe to stir.

"It was so nice!" she said softly, as I picked up the tray. "I feel so warm and drowsy." And indeed when I returned a few minutes later from the kitchen she was curled up in the big chair sound asleep.

I moved softly around the room, possessed myself of a magazine, after a moment's thought rejected a cigar, and sat down by the larger lamp to read. But every now and then my eyes strayed to the relaxed, slender form in the padded chair. Poor little weary woman from nowhere, who had slipped into the circle of my firelight from the vague World Outside. I wondered curiously what misfortunes had brought her to the bench in the park. From where had she come? Then, a more disquiet-

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ing thought, where was she going? Why should she go? Yes, of course, she must go. But, where? Certainly not into that vague World Outside. That would never do.

CHAPTER III

WHENCE SHE CAME

IT must have been nearly eleven o'clock when, glancing up from my magazine, I found her looking at me, her gray eyes wide with wondering uncertainty.

"Oh, I forgot," she said. "I must have fallen asleep." She stood up, leaning unsteadily on the chair. "I must go."

"Where?"

"Home," the words came slowly. "It must be very late."

"Wait," I said; "I'll call a cab."

"No, no," she protested.

Of course it was plain that a girl found half-starved in the park at night had no "home" to which she was willing or likely to go. She had volunteered no explanation and I disliked to ask for one. But one meal and a few hours

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by the fire could only be delaying the time when someone must help her. Why should not I? Why not now?

"The fact is," I said bluntly, "that you really don't wish to go anywhere in particular. But you think you ought not to stay here. Won't you tell me what the trouble is? Something temporary, I suppose. Can't I help you tide it over?"

She swayed indecisively for a moment, her eyes closed and forehead puckered. Then she sat down again in the deep chair and, leaning forward earnestly, told me a little of her story.

"I can't explain everything," she said, "but I would like you to know why you found me there and why I let you bring me here. I came to Chicago only two years ago to act as private secretary to a man, whom I had known before. I'll call him Smith. He was an old friend of the family and when circumstances forced me to get work he offered me this position. For reasons connected with other people I did not care for acquaintances. I've lived

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very much alone in a boarding house down on Indiana Avenue near Twentieth Street. I haven't really a friend in town, but I don't mind playing around by myself, so I've been quite comfortable. Only, you see, I've no one to appeal to in time of trouble."

"That seems to be the way of the world," I said sententiously as she paused. "If we deny the world when we are self-sufficient; the world denies us in the day of our insufficiency."

"Solemn thought, isn't it?" she replied politely, but with suppressed amusement. Then she added more seriously: "It's been bitterly true in my case."

"About two weeks ago a big change was made in Mr. Smith's business. The Chicago office was given up and Mr. Smith sent out to California to open up a branch there; the main office is in New York. He had very little time in which to arrange matters here as the change was decided upon suddenly after several weeks of discussion. Nevertheless he made arrangements for me to take a position

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with—well, a big mail-order house. Mr.—Jones, a department head, and Mr. Smith were close friends and it was arranged that I should go in as assistant to Mr.—Jones.”

“We are not going to tell our real names, I gather,” I remarked, dryly.

“Oh, it’s unfair of me,” she said, “because you’ve been so kind to me and of course”—a glint of mischief touched her somber eyes—“I could find out your name from the mail box downstairs. But please let everything about me be unidentified—for the present.”

“All right—for the present,” I repeated.

“I was to report to Mr. Jones last Monday morning. Mr. Smith left several days before and I spent the intervening time in some long-neglected shopping. My nice old landlady sold out a little while ago and a horrible creature took her place. I might as well say that while I can attend to a man’s work, in business, I can’t take care of my own affairs. Every attempt I’ve made at keeping accounts has failed. So I don’t dare to run bills. The only person

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I've ever owed in Chicago was my landlady. I was two weeks behind when she sold out and the new woman, who is a close-fisted thing, bought all unpaid accounts with the place. My poor old lady told me she insisted on taking them over at seventy-five cents on the dollar. But she'll collect every cent.

“The new ‘missus’, as the servants call her, was very sweet but I knew she was a hag and I meant to pay up that old bill right away. Then in the joy of my shopping I forgot altogether about it. Last Saturday night I found not only that I couldn’t pay the old bill but that I had less than five dollars to apply on last week. I went to ‘missus’ to explain and she was horrible. ‘I see you’ve lost your job,’ she said. She’d noticed that I was around in the middle of the day. ‘No, I haven’t,’ I answered, ‘I’m just changing jobs. My new job begins Monday.’ ‘Well, I’d like my money or at least a part of it,’ she replied, softening a little, and I went back to my room shaking with anger.

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“You see, I’m not used to being insulted or having my word doubted. But the worst was to come. Half an hour afterward the landlady’s son knocked on my door. He must have been created a disagreeable, useless young puppy, and his mother has bred him into a very nasty dog. He suggested smirkily that he might ‘call off the mater,’ only I was such a stand-offish person that I didn’t encourage anyone to be friendly.

“I snapped out that he didn’t seem to need any encouragement and then—oh, what is the use of my telling you all this. You can guess the situation. I went downtown Monday determined to ask Mr. Jones to advance me a week’s salary. That would quiet the ‘missus’ real suspicions and give me time to write to my sister in Detroit for help. But an awful thing happened.

“Mr. Jones’ father had died and he had gone East suddenly. No one in the office knew a thing about me. Of course, Mr. Jones had forgotten in his rush and trouble that I was com-

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ing Monday and apparently he hadn't happened to tell anyone. Naturally the women in his department, who had been expecting to be pushed up to fill the place of the assistant who had left, weren't very cordial to me. In fact I think they thought that I was trying to get the place. Since Mr. Jones hadn't said anything about me they probably doubted if I had been chosen. They were really quite horrid. I was never so embarrassed in my life.

"Just like a little fool I went home to think it over. The 'missus' met me in the hall. 'Didn't get the job, I see,' she sneered; 'well I intend to get my money just the same!' Still acting like a fool I unfastened my purse and turned it upside down on the hall table. 'There's every cent I have,' I said; 'take it!' Then in a moment of sanity I grabbed a half dollar and said: 'I'll use this to telegraph my sister for enough to pay my bill and then I'll leave this—this'—well, I called the house a pretty bad name. You see, I was dreadfully

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angry and really she had recently taken in some very queer looking 'peroxides.'

" 'Oh, that's what you call my boarding house for refined young ladies, is it,' she screamed. 'Very well. You can't go too soon for me. But, I tell you, not another meal will you eat in this house. I ought to turn you out on the street but you can sleep here if you think it's respectable enough for your ladyship.'

"Her hoarse, high voice rang through the house. I could hear doors opening upstairs and could see skirts sticking through the railings along the second-floor hall. It was terrible.

" 'You can stay until sweet sister sends you enough to pay your bill—but don't you try to sneak out with any of your things or I'll—' I couldn't stand it any longer. I simply bolted through the front door—and scurried away down the street to a telegraph office. I tramped around all day, spending time in department store rest-rooms, at the Art Institute, Public

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Library and such places. At night I bought some fruit and crackers with my remaining pennies and stole in about ten o'clock unobserved. No telegram. I thought perhaps there would be a letter in the morning. No letter in the first mail.

"I just missed the 'missus' in the hall but got out safely and went to a secluded corner in a downtown hotel for another 'think-fest.' I had eaten the remains of my fruit and crackers in my room so I had a little courage left. Then I realized what had happened and all my courage left me.

"My brother-in-law's business requires him to take a long trip usually once a year. He travels way to the Coast, but very slowly—long stops at big towns and he always takes my sister with him. Having no children, they simply shut up their apartment. Their maid usually goes to her mother's house, just coming around now and then so as to keep an eye on things. My sister and I don't correspond as much as we used to, so I had entirely for-

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gotten that she had said a few weeks ago that they would probably leave about this time.

“The most irritating thing was that they were sure to reach Chicago soon, but just when I couldn’t tell. They usually stopped at the hotel I was in when this idea occurred to me; so I went to the desk and asked if rooms were reserved for them. No, of course not, that would have been too good luck.

“Obviously I couldn’t live on nothing for a week. What did people do when they needed money? They pawned things! Well, I didn’t have much but I thought I could get a few dollars on some small pieces of jewelry. So I tramped back home. You see, I didn’t have even car fare. I was glad I lived at Twentieth!

“I gathered up my courage and marched in, bold as brass. My room door was locked! On it was the ‘missus’ card on which she had written: ‘See me.’ I heard her voice downstairs and I ran down as fast as I could and furiously demanded to know why my room was locked.

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“ ‘Well, Miss Hoity-Toity,’ she said, ‘I thought you might begin to *pawn* some of your things, now you haven’t got your job. People do that sometimes, even *real* ladies! And as that stuff of yours is about all I’m likely to get for my bill I thought I’d better lock it up. Still waiting to hear from sister? Well, you can sleep in the vacant room on the third floor for a night or two, if you like.’

“ ‘Then I lost my temper and began to threaten and when she laughed I could have choked her. ‘Get a lawyer,’ she cackled, ‘he won’t ask for pay; they like to work for nothing; get a policeman, why don’t you? Haven’t you any friends? Even nice, refined ladies have gentleman friends —’ and so on, louder and higher and meaner and more insinuating every minute, until I ran out of the house.

“ ‘Perhaps I’ve told enough so that you can see my predicament. I really didn’t know a person in town to whom I could have gone and asked for help—for relief. I simply couldn’t go and beg pennies from the few people I had

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known casually in a business way. I suppose they might have done something but I couldn't bear to think of a refusal and I almost felt that I would starve before I could even ask. So I tried to look for work, temporary work.

“Maybe I didn't go about it right. I'm supposed to be a good stenographer and typist but the advertised jobs are all permanent ones and, of course, I expect to get that position as soon as Mr. Jones comes back. I went there every day in hopes he might have come or written. The girls all laughed whenever I appeared, but I had to do it. Well, I couldn't get any work Tuesday or Wednesday and the little food I got was *very* little and I'm never going to tell anybody how! It's lucky my clothes were respectable or I wouldn't have been permitted in the hotels and other places where I went to rest. Wednesday night that despicable cub, that the 'missus' takes pride in having reared, met me on the stairs. I think he had been watching for me. If he hadn't been slow-witted and half drunk I wouldn't

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have got by as well as I did. As it was I slammed my door in his leering face. Then I knew that I couldn't sleep in that house again.

"To-day I tramped everywhere looking for any kind of work, anything that would pay for food and lodging. I couldn't get it, that is, not in any decent—that is, I simply couldn't get it. I didn't dare to go back to the house so I wandered into the park. I had been looking for a place in one of the small restaurants out this way at dinner time. Now, don't tell me I'm a fool. Could I have helped myself in some way I haven't thought of? What else could I have done?"

"Nothing that I think of," I answered slowly. "It's amazing, isn't it, how quickly we lose our grip on even the necessities of life if all communication with those who know us is suddenly broken. I kept thinking of that while you talked. Of course, I have a thousand ties that bind me more or less to a large number of people. If by accident some of those were broken still I would maintain my place,

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my poise. But, suppose I had only two or three such cords, such as you had, and they were all cut at one stroke and I had no money. I suppose I should become a mere plaything for the wind in the streets. Doors are opened only to those who are known or have money. No one would take me in, no one would aid me, unless I admitted myself a helpless thing and begged for professional charity."

"Oh, you would have a much easier time than I," she said, rather bitterly. "The world is used to the man without money or friends, and gives him a few rights of brotherhood. He may lounge in hotels and saloons, he may scrape up acquaintances, he may help out in odd jobs for a dime or a quarter. But a woman must have money or have rights upon some man's money. There's no right of sisterhood for her."

She stopped talking abruptly in some embarrassment, her delicate features flushed, her hands gesturing futilely.

"How ungrateful," she stammered, "for me

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to talk this way when you have been so kind. But I've had a hard day, full of very bitter things. Well—I've told you my story. I'm sorry it was so long. It must be very late. But I wanted you to see just how everything happened. I couldn't skip over things and make it plain. You see, I've nothing to be ashamed of and, as you suggested in the beginning, my trouble is only temporary. I'm sure sister will be here to-morrow."

"Meanwhile," I said, assuming a business-like manner, "there are two things to be done. You can go to a hotel, which would be embarrassing, as it is late, though I could provide you with a satchel for the sake of posing as a recent arrival, or you can stay here. My sister's room is just as she left it and you are welcome to it. Sister is scared to death about burglars whenever I'm away over night, which is often necessary in my business. So she has fitted up the door with all kinds of bolts and chains. The window has a safety catch. There's an extension phone at the head of the

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bed. It's as safe as a bank vault. You could dismiss all uneasiness at the thought of being in a strange house and get the rest that you need. In the morning I shall make some of our famous coffee and then we'll discuss the future. Yes, yes, that's the thing to do."

I walked up and down during this speech avoiding interruption by refusing to look at her and by disregarding gasps of protest. In pitiful confusion she tried to frame her objections to my proposal, but her expressed embarrassments were so obviously fictitious and her real embarrassments so obviously inexpressible that her protest was feeble and unconvincing. I rode it down, unmercifully.

"Nonsense, you are struggling with a lot of conventional ideas that have no application. We are facing facts, mysterious young lady, unconventional, undeniable facts. There is no good reason why you should not stay here, except that you might find it necessary to lie about it afterwards. Well, what of that? Of course, it's wicked to lie, but it's more wicked

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to be stupid and you would only need to lie to stupid people—those who ask questions they've no business to ask and haven't the intelligence to appreciate honest answers—so it doesn't seem to me it would be very wrong to be a little wicked to save wicked people from being more wicked—that is, stupid people from being more stupid.”

“Do you always talk this way?” she interrupted, “or are you just doing it to amuse me and make me forget my troubles.”

“No, no, like Holmes' character, I very seldom dare to be as funny as I am. Honestly I'm rattling along because down in my heart I'm just as embarrassed as you are and I don't want you to know it. This way, please!”

I walked to the door of my sister's room and snapped on the lights. She followed me with a strange, little smile hovering around her parted lips. I bowed ceremoniously and she passed in.

“Good-night, and pleasant dreams,” I said solemnly.

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She turned and faced me and for a moment gave me the full sweetness of her flooded, tender eyes. Then, almost in a whisper, she said: "Good-night," and shut the door.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEXT DAY

NOW she had fled back to the World Outside. The melodramatic intrusion of my strange neighbor had driven her into the unfriendly streets from which I thought I had saved her. In the morning I had expected to give her in some way the temporary aid she needed. She must face another day's fight alone; perhaps she would not even meet the evening appointment. I could guess that she dreaded to seek me in the attitude of expecting help. Yet she must feel that she owed me an explanation of her flight. Surely if she had thought me in danger she would not have run away, with a telephone in the room through which she could summon help.

No, she must have feared for herself. This man evidently had some connection with her

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past life, concerning which she had said so little. Why should she be working in a city remote from all old associations or living relatives? Why should she not desire acquaintances? It looked as if she wished to avoid someone, as if she was determined to leave no trail for someone to pick up and follow. Curlew, my neighbor, was plainly that someone. He had spoken of searching and when he feared that she might escape he became desperate in pursuit. What was their relationship—former lovers? I was conscious of an absurd but distinct feeling of jealousy. Perhaps man and wife—a most disquieting thought. Puzzling over the causes responsible for the turmoil of this most amazing night I had ever passed I stared blindly into the ashes, my head sagging forward upon my chest until suddenly sleep halted my groping fancies.

I supposed the postman's ring awakened me to the necessity of restoring the circulation to my cramped limbs and taking up the usual business of the day. The chill common sense of the

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shower-bath speedily drove out of my thoughts the romantic illusions of the previous evening. Forgetting that the practical demands of the day cloud truth just as effectively as the moon-spun desires of the night, the entire episode took on an appearance of sinister absurdity. Dismissing it arbitrarily I turned my attention to the question of adjusting sundry engagements necessarily disturbed by my late start. The very business of suretyship in which I was engaged, involved constantly furnishing bonds to insure against loss from the recognized untrustworthiness of the majority of men and women when in trouble. And I had accepted the story of this woman, obviously in distress, as all wool and a yard wide. I prided myself on my judgment of human nature, that supposedly keen judgment necessary to a successful dealer in surety bonds!

By lunch time, however, the reaction set in. As a matter of fact, the fundamental basis of my business was trust, confidence that most men were honest, that most businesses were honest,

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that most officials were trustworthy. This confidence, plus the salesman's ability to spot and avoid obvious rascals, was what insured my company's profits. That woman was a thorough-bred. I knew it.

I marched out of the restaurant once more an optimist—that happiest, most foolish optimist in the world, a middle-aged bachelor who suddenly finds stirring in himself a long atrophied ability to fall in love. Then by merest chance I caught sight of Curlew disappearing in a doorway across the street. Something in his manner of looking backwards annoyed me. He seemed to be watching me. Is he following me around, I thought? I could test that very quickly, so I walked on down the block, turned into a quiet side street and hurried through it. As I turned the next corner I glanced back carelessly. Curlew was loping along the sidewalk a couple of hundred feet away. Paying no further attention to him I went back to my office.

“Man called,” said the office boy. “Didn’t

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leave any name; wanted to know if you'd be in about five o'clock."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall, thin fellow," was the boy's description. "Kind of wild-eyed!"

"What did you say?"

"Said you usually came in about that time before you went home, if you'd been out. He said he would probably drop in."

"I guess you gave him the information he wanted," I remarked dryly. "Let me know if he calls again!"

Evidently Curlew feared he might lose me during the day, so while I was safely at lunch he had sounded the office to find out when I would leave there so that he could pick up the lost trail. He intended to follow me until I met Her again. Well, perhaps I could dispose of that notion. I certainly intended to see her without any danger of assisting him in his pursuit, at least until I had heard her side of the story. I trot around town a great deal in my business, so I gave Mr. Curlew a very enter-

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taining afternoon, but no intimation that I observed him shadowing me.

About five-thirty I closed my desk and gladdened Mr. Curlew with my appearance on the sidewalk. Favored with his company I walked over to a store which suited my purpose admirably. It was a grocery store in front with a popular bar neatly concealed in the rear, from which a back door opened on an alley. Even if Curlew were acquainted with this egress he would naturally assume that I, being unsuspecting of his presence, would leave by the front door.

Refusing the cordial call of an acquaintance whose middle name was reputed to be Alcohol, I slipped out through the alley door. Turning east I hurried across town to Wabash Avenue, where I boarded a car without seeing anything of my pursuer. Not daring to eat at my Club, with the idea that he might inquire and watch for me there, I had decided to dine at an inconspicuous uptown hotel.

From there I took a taxi-cab out to the park

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and, bidding the driver wait where the path crossed the roadway, I arrived at the rendezvous at almost exactly eight o'clock. I had waited impatiently for two or three minutes when I heard a step on the grass behind me and turning saw Her hurrying down the sloping lawn.

"I waited a moment on the upper path," she explained, "to be sure that you were not followed."

"Or had not brought anyone with me?" I asked, smiling.

"No, I didn't think you would do that, but I'm so afraid."

"I have a taxi-cab at the end of the path. If you will take a little ride with me we can talk in safety."

"Oh, there's no need of that," she said hastily. "I just want to tell you that my sister is in town, so that I'm all right now. And I want to thank you more than I can express for what you did for me last night."

"Aren't you going to tell me why you ran

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away last night? You didn't fear me, did you?"

"Oh, no, no," she protested. "I understand last night better than you. I can't explain. I'm so sorry he troubled you, but it was more of a shock to me than to you."

"You are talking mysteries to me, of course, but I must tell you something about this man for your own sake. Won't you come with me in the cab? Frankly I'm afraid of his following me here, though I think he is off the track just now."

"Oh dear, what bad luck that he should have seen me." Her hand trembled for a moment on my arm. "Yes, yes, I must know all about him that I can. You'll tell me, won't you?"

"Head for Lincoln Park," I told the driver, "and keep going north till I tell you to stop."

"Yes, sir," he said. He was a very decent driver. He didn't even grin.

"If you could give me a little explanation I might be more helpful," I said as soon as the rattle and roar of getting under way had sub-

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sided. "I don't wish to pry, but I would like immensely to be useful."

"You've been splendid," she burst out extravagantly. "Don't think I don't appreciate it. But I simply can not tell some things. I'll tell you this; that man is the last man in the world I wanted to meet. Last night I woke up suddenly and thought I heard his voice. I was simply terror-stricken. Where he had come from I didn't know. I thought that I must have been mistaken. I picked up my coat and hat—I had lain down without undressing, everything was so strange, you see, and I was so tired—and I stepped out into the hall very carefully. I heard a murmur from the room down the hall. It scared me. I tiptoed back and wrote the little note so I could explain why I had left. I didn't like to go but I didn't dare to stay. I was standing in the hall again, undecided what to do, when I heard his voice plainly—I could not mistake that voice. He was angry and I heard him say distinctly: 'If you won't talk I'll have to talk

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to her.' I opened the outer door, closed it softly behind me, and simply flew down the stairs. That's all there is to my story—except that when I inquired at the hotel this morning Dorothy had arrived, so I'm on easy street again, which means that I'm in a new boarding house!"

"What did you do before you found Sister Dorothy?" I asked.

"Oh, I just walked around." She slid rapidly over that long misery. "Please tell me what you know. How did he happen to be there?"

"He didn't happen," I said, grimly. "He broke in and demanded to know your name and where you had come from. As I didn't know either I was very discreet! I kept your secret well!"

"Just like him," she said. "I don't suppose he really meant any harm and yet he never had a bit of self-control."

The "yet" was what bothered me. I replied flippantly, "I'm sure he didn't mean any

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harm. He's always been such a peaceful neighbor. But I was a little disturbed for fear when he couldn't force me to tell what I didn't know that he might casually kill me. I was sure he'd regret it afterwards, but was not quite reconciled to causing that regret."

"Did you say he was a neighbor?" she demanded. "You know him?"

"He lives across the hall from me. Moved in some months ago, but I don't believe that I've ever seen him until he introduced himself to me last night. His face was very near to me then, but as the room was dark and he had just been choking me he didn't impress me very favorably. I got a better look at him later, my best and final view being along the sights of a revolver. You see, he left a bit unwillingly."

I felt a little cheap after this braggadocio but the girl piqued me. She didn't seem to have been a bit impressed with the hazardous adventure into which she had drawn me. Masculine pride demanded a little strut.

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“Never, never, never,” she exclaimed, “would I have gone to your house had I guessed that he lived there. I’m terribly sorry I brought him down upon you. He’s a raging child with two men’s strength in anger. Of course, he was frightfully upset and behaved outrageously.”

“That’s all past now,” I said thoroughly ashamed of my egotism. “This man said that he meant you no harm, that he had searched for you for years; he intimated that you might wish to avoid him from some mistaken idea about him. But when I made the random suggestion that he had no right to see you I seemed to hit home.”

“There’s no mistake,” she said wearily. “I’ll tell this much, Mr.—Winston—”

“You did look in the hall,” I accused. “You took my name from the mail box and you won’t give me yours.”

“It’s very different,” she said in some confusion. “Your name is open to the world. To give you my name would be to put a seal on

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your lips, to put you under a sacred obligation never to do some things that might bring terrible distress to me. I am already under deep obligations to you as a stranger. I should have to assume still heavier debts to you as a friend."

It was quite dark in the cab; she was very near to me; I rediscovered a forgotten pulse in my temples as the illusions of the night before returned with still greater force. She was a wonderful woman! I knew nothing about her, but I knew her, and that was enough. Attraction has no reasons; it simply is. It is the same with—affection. I was really—fond of her. I couldn't help it; why should I? I needn't make a silly ass of myself. It was a fine feeling to be fond of anyone, an admirable, comfortable, warming feeling, that gave life a sudden keenness. Yes, I would permit myself to—be fond of her. How handy that little word "fond" was. "Love" would have scared me; so, like many a timid lover, I said "fond." Also I said it to myself. Out loud I remarked courageously:

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"I shall be the one under obligations if you will consider me as a friend." Could anything have been more stupid?

After a moment of dismal silence, in which my self-esteem shrank to invisibility, she said:

"I started to tell you that I am making no mistakes about Mr. Curlew, because all that is wrong with him is what you saw last night. That utter lack of control has wrecked his life and would wreck any life in which he was an influence. I am sorry for him but I fear him. The only way to be safe from him is to pass out of his life and leave no path whereby he may follow. He has no right to follow me. He knows it but he persists."

"Did he ever have such a right?" I had no business asking that question, but I couldn't stop my tongue in time.

"No," she said; "no right. His pursuit isn't unreasonable but he has no right."

Now what did she mean by that? Did she mean that he had no right which she acknowledged? Again the ugly thought came: was he

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a husband who had forfeited legally, or morally in her judgment, his rights?

"Mr. Winston," she cried suddenly, "did I tell you my sister's name?"

"Dorothy, I believe you said."

"I shouldn't have done that. But having made one slip I'm tempted to toboggan all the way."

I waited patiently.

"Yes, I will. I need a friend in Chicago, Mr. Winston, need one very badly, especially since Mr. Curlew is on my trail. You see, I'm being candid, not sentimental."

"May I take the sentimental part?" A most frivolous interjection.

"No, you must be candid, too. I know enough about you, both from your treatment of me and by reputation to appreciate your offer of friendship. If I put myself in relationship with a few respectable people perhaps we can consider ourselves acquainted. My name—that is what makes it difficult—my business name is Miss Littlefield. That's what you must call me.

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I was forced to take some name for common use that wouldn't attract Mr. Curlew's casual attention. Now I'm going to tell you something that nobody in Chicago knows, my real name, which must never be whispered so as to identify either my sister or myself. I was christened Gwenn Fenton. I didn't want to introduce myself falsely but please forget that name on the spot."

"I won't forget it but I'll never use it until you tell me I may, Miss Littlefield."

"That was very nice. Thank you. My brother-in-law is Rex Harbury. He's with the Rockaway Company in Detroit."

"Is that so! I know Ed. Costerman, secretary of the Rockaway Company, very well."

"Almost an introduction, isn't it?" she laughed. "But I can do better than that. My brother-in-law is a director in the Nelson Green Company here. You do business for them, I believe."

"Yes, I handle all their surety bonds. I understand now what you meant in speaking of

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knowing me 'by reputation.' I'm not a conspicuous person, so I was puzzled."

"Rex said that Mr. Green thought very highly of you."

"He's an old friend," I said in some embarrassment. "Very kind of him, I'm sure. It seems to me that we've been most respectably introduced. Now, what I wish to know is, what can I do? Certainly it should be possible to relieve you of Mr. Curlew."

"No, that won't be possible and I can not explain about him. Also I am going to ask you on honor not to try to find out anything about my sister or myself or Mr. Curlew. I'm not ashamed of the past, but it is better for everyone that it should be a sealed book. Will you be a good friend and leave it so?"

"Anything you say," I answered vaguely, feeling quite dissatisfied with these conditions. It is a bit hard to take situations and people as they are. One's conventional standards are fixed to interpret the present by the past. We often talk boldly about "a new deal" and "wip-

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ing the slate clean," but though we discard and draw, win and lose, we never deal or score. There's just one deal and death alone can clean the slate.

"You're not enthusiastic," she remarked after a moment of silence.

"Yes," I said, "I'm enthusiastic to help but the conditions are rather hampering. What can I do?"

"You might keep an eye on Mr. Curlew," she said reflectively.

I laughed.

"That would be very easy if I had one in the back of my head. He's followed me all day. Could I give him any message from you that might stop the pursuit?"

"I can't think of anything that would."

"By George!" I exclaimed, at a sudden recollection. "When he broke in on me last night he said that he intended to save you the pain of seeing him if some things were true. You may know what he meant. Perhaps they are true or perhaps I could lie a bit for you."

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"I can't see what he meant," she responded, gropingly.

"It occurred to me that perhaps if he thought you were—married—may be that was what he was driving at. Can't I conjure up a husband for you? I might even assume—the—that is—I might pretend—"

"No, that would never do," she broke in, fiercely. "That wouldn't help at all!"

There was positive terror in her voice. Confound it! Was she, or had she been married to the brute? That would explain her excitement, in fact would explain everything. Then another idea—a most embarrassing one—arose.

"It's barely possible," I said, hesitatingly, "of course, I suggest it very reluctantly, but, you see, I'm so much in the dark. It may have been his thought—it's a long time since he's seen you, I believe—that you were—that you had had reverses, hard times and had, well, sort of gone down hill, you know—"

I heard a little gasp and stopped in confusion.

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"Yes, yes," she breathed, "he was always so stern, so uncompromising about such things. I never thought of that. It might be a way out."

I sat dumbly amazed.

"Perhaps if he thought that," she continued with strange hopefulness, "he might give up the chase! That's a wonderful idea, Mr. Winston."

"You really suggest," I demanded, "that I should toss your reputation to him, like a bone to a vicious dog."

"It might do," she said with a bit of constraint. "I hope you don't think I consider it a light sacrifice. But oh, Mr. Winston, I've had the fear of that man in my heart every day in the year; every time a door has opened I've looked up dreading to see him come raging into my life tramping on the comfort and happiness and peace that I love. So I've dreaded his appearance for years and at last he has sighted me. Is it strange that I would be glad if you could make him believe anything, any-

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thing that would take him out of my life forever?"

"No, it isn't," I answered warmly, "but would it last? Or, on second thought, would he come back, determined to—redeem you?"

"Not he," was the scornful reply. "He is one of those men who will excuse every sin except the one of which he is incapable. You see, a man doesn't sell himself; he only buys!"

To say that the vigor of this remark stunned me expresses its effect too feebly. I had approached the suggestion timorously and first been surprised at her immediate frank acceptance of it and then amazed at her decisive readiness to use the weapon; but the unnecessary candor of her last statement shocked me as much as though she had suddenly screamed: "Votes for Women." The parallel is exact because I deprecated, not the sentiment, but the manner of its delivery. I had a moment's horror that this delicate, appealing little woman might be "strong-minded," a vague descriptive, particularly favored by bachelors, who

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resent the idea that the womanhood they graciously protect in leisure moments should ever be self-sufficient. The age of thirty-five found me strong in this resentment. Later years have suggested that intelligence is an admirable quality in a prospective housekeeper and not to be scorned even in a comrade goddess.

“I thought better of you than that,” was her next remark, with a tinge of bitterness. “You didn’t like what I said. It sounded bold. Of course, I haven’t lived twenty odd years and worked here alone for the last two years without learning a few facts about life, but being a woman I suppose you think I ought to pretend to be ignorant of them, even though the knowledge has an important bearing on just what we are discussing. That’s why a man can never be a full friend to a woman; she’s always a woman to him!”

“And I suppose you want me to believe that a woman can be friendly to a man in total disregard of his sex,” I retorted; “receive him in curl-papers, pigtail and an old dressing gown!”

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“That’s no test,” she said unfairly. “But, to go back to Mr. Curlew, I think the idea which you suggested, which shall be nameless out of respect for your feelings, would really settle him. Would you really be willing to enlighten him as to the unworthiness of the object of his pursuit? I hope I don’t seem hard-hearted, but I have every right to defend myself and this is the only real defense that has ever occurred to me.”

“Certainly, I’ll slander you if you wish. It’s a contemptible part to play, but it’s certainly in a good cause.”

“He may be very angry,” she said, “but not at you. I mean, don’t—don’t—”

“Don’t drag myself in,” I suggested. “You may be sure that I will not. I shall cast myself for the part of the good Samaritan. The villain of the road to Jericho shall be nameless. I do not care to supply Mr. Curlew with the immediate object of his wrath. He’ll probably be watching for me when I come in to-night.”

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"Oh, that reminds me," she cried. "Dorothy left word at the hotel for me to be sure to telephone her before nine o'clock. She and her husband had gone out to dine with a business acquaintance of his when I phoned. I was busy until almost seven o'clock getting moved into my new house. It must be after nine now."

"Shall I have the man drive to the nearest phone—or—why not let me take you to the hotel? We can get there in fifteen minutes."

"That would be best," she said. "You are very thoughtful and so ready to help."

I would have stood on my head gladly, to hear her repeat that remark, in just the same intimate, grateful tone. In a greedy moment I pretended not to have heard and said: "Beg pardon." Then in shame I hastily pushed open the cab-door and bawled to the driver to turn around and drive back to the hotel she named. Suddenly I realized that in fifteen minutes she would leave me. Of course, I couldn't go in and pose as a rescuing hero

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before grateful relatives, even if she asked me, which she probably would not do.

“I suppose that you will stay some time with your sister, so that I can not have the pleasure of seeing you home,” I began formally, and ended abruptly; “Where shall I see you to-morrow?”

“To-morrow?” she said, vaguely.

“It’s Saturday,” I answered inanely. “I mean, I shall wish to report progress with Mr. Curlew and shall be free to do so almost any time.”

“It depends on Dorothy,” she said. “Her husband is making only a brief stop here. They may leave about noon, perhaps not until three or four o’clock.”

“Suppose I call for you at five o’clock—at your new home.”

“Oh, no,” she remonstrated. “He might be following you. I’m afraid of meeting him every minute I spend in the streets but I wouldn’t risk his finding out where I live for worlds!”

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"I have it," I exclaimed. "You stay right at the hotel after your sister leaves until I call for you. I'll telephone early in the afternoon and learn the hour so as not to keep you waiting."

"Perhaps that will be best," she agreed. "Here we are now."

"Then I will say good-night. You are sure of finding your sister in, I suppose?"

"I think so. Won't you come in and meet them?" The invitation was distinctly half-hearted.

"I'm sure you would prefer to be left alone," I said, "but"—yielding to the one-minute-more impulse, usually indulged in with one hand on the door-knob—"I'll step in a moment until you make sure that they are in."

"Mrs. Harbury?" said the clerk, "room—ah, I forgot—is this Miss Littlefield? She left a note."

I stood aside gazing idly around as she opened the message. Something about the head of a man lounging near me caught my

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roving eye. It looked unpleasantly familiar. Where had I seen him before? A sudden recollection came of Curlew as he had turned away the previous night and walked sulkily to the door. Could it be possible? I took a careful step or two nearer. The man moved and exposed the face of a stranger—a most friendly stranger. I wanted to shake his hand! But the incident called my attention to the risk of dallying in a hotel corridor. I stepped briskly back to her side.

“Don’t you think we had better”—I stopped blankly. She looked up suddenly, her eyes full and piteous.

“She’s gone,” she stammered; “Dorothy’s gone!”

She stood undecidedly pulling at her lip with her ungloved fingers.

“Then this is no place for us,” I said with false cheeriness. “Back to the cab!” And I hurried her half-protesting out to the street, a most pathetic morsel of humanity as she pattered unwillingly across the tiled floor.

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"South on Michigan," I told the driver.

"Now tell me just what has happened," I commanded.

"It's nothing," she said, quickly regaining her composure. "Rex wanted to leave on the 9:15 to-night so as to travel with a man he's doing business with and he did some telephoning during dinner that made it possible—so they went. Dorothy was so sorry that I didn't telephone. We could have had at least a few minutes together."

"That's too bad. This was a most unfortunate cab ride for you, I'm afraid. It was all my fault," I said insincerely.

"Not at all," she answered. "If we hadn't taken this ride that idea for discouraging Mr. Curlew might never have occurred to either of us. If you succeed with that, I shall call this the most fortunate evening I ever spent."

"If that's your feeling," I said enthusiastically, "I shall have no scruples. I shall paint you with a heart of midnight and a cloak of scarlet! Henceforth to him your name shall

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be anathema! By the way, what name shall I make anathema?"

"Oh," she cried, clutching my arm excitedly, "I almost forgot. Oh, that would have been terrible!"

"Of course, I didn't see any use in calling you Miss Littlefield if he knew you as—Gwenn Fenton." That was the first time I had ever pronounced her name. I realized the unique importance of the occasion. Confidentially I almost had stage fright. But it sounded beautiful to me as it rolled off the tongue—Gwenn Fenton.

I heard myself reiterating it in later days—Miss Fenton, with an air of pride—Miss Gwenn Fenton, pride and intimacy combined,—and then Gwenn—Gwenn—Gwenn—a call in solitude to The Woman Enthroned—Gwenn, a whisper sent out into the kind night for the wind to carry—Gwenn, a magical thought to bring a hush into the roar of the day and loneliness into the crowded streets—Gwenn, the

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final happiness, the murmuring music of repeating her name—her name—to her!

I was drifting very rapidly into still more maudlin imaginings, when she upset my “bark o’ dreams.”

“You mustn’t by any chance mention any name—that is any real name. Give me any name you choose, but don’t let it be either of my real names.”

“But he’ll think he’s mistaken. I must identify you in some way or he won’t give up the chase.”

She puzzled for a minute or two.

“Tell him that you’ve seen this,” she said, suddenly. She pulled off her glove and then a ring from her little finger of her left hand. I switched on the interior electric light.

It was a simple thing, a narrow band of gold holding a small ruby, deeply set.

“Look,” she said, and I read engraved in script on the inside: “George to Agnes.”

“Agnes was my mother’s name. Don’t men-

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tion my name but simply describe this ring and say that I said it was my mother's. This is very important. I suppose it all seems strange, but if you really wish to help, this is the way to do it. Yet why should you help?"

Of course, it was a grand opportunity to lay one hand on my heart, seize her fingers with the other and, following all the canons of popular fiction, remark in tense, dulcet tones: "Because I love you!" But a bachelor of thirty-five doesn't act that way on one day's acquaintance. He may think like a fool, he may be a fool, but he has learned to conceal it partially. Recognizing the value of darkness I turned the electric button. But the only tribute paid to the near presence of Romance was a slight blur in my words.

"I'm very glad to help. I lead a selfish, humdrum life most of the time." Of course, I didn't believe this, but it sounded well. "It's very interesting, actually delightful, to think that I can be of any real service to one whom it must always be a pleasure to serve." Pretty

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near the edge, old boy, and on stilts, too, a risky position.

She chuckled slyly.

"You said that just like a nice, old gentleman," she remarked, abstractedly. "I wonder why you use such odd, stilted phrases now and then. You almost embarrass me with them. It doesn't seem really cordial."

"Probably if I were more cordial, I'd embarrass you more," I retorted.

"Does the driver know where he is going?" she said abruptly.

"He will," I said, "if you will tell me your present address. Or is that another thing I mustn't know?"

She gave the street and number without comment and I repeated it to the driver. Then I sat back glumly. I could hear her tapping one hand nervously upon the other.

"Mr. Winston," she said softly. Her voice shook slightly. "Maybe I can tell you everything before long. I'm not deceiving you, but some secrets are not my secrets to give away.

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It is a valueless gift, but I have given *you* a great deal of trust in telling you what I have. Can't you trust *me* for a little while?"

I restrained a violent inclination to hug her, not to "embrace" her, but just simply to hug her, as one hugs an adorable child. As usual I compromised.

"Here's my hand on it," I said, and then shamelessly took both her hands in mine and held them close. "I'm with you, first, last, and all the time."

"Thank you," she said, breathing quickly.

The cab stopped.

"This is the place," I heard dimly.

I clung to my prizes for another precious moment.

"Yours to command," I said thickly. Then I opened the door.

She ran lightly up the steps and turned the key in the lock.

"At five to-morrow?" she asked, pausing in the half-open door. I had almost forgotten.

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“Why not earlier? I’ll look for you in the writing room at, say—”

“Three,” she suggested.

“Or two?”

“Very well, at two.” An attempt at primness, but I was not deceived. “Good-night.”

The door was closed.

I gave the driver my house number and unconsciously squared my shoulders as the car lurched forward. I was on my way to meet the violent Mr. Curlew and tell him a few things which he would not be pleased to hear. I had all of a man’s job ahead of me. But then, I felt like two!

CHAPTER V

ON THE STAIRS

AS I mounted the last few steps the door at the head of the stairs opened suddenly and Curlew stepped into the hall. Disappointment and anxiety wrought vivid lines in his strong face.

"You have seen her," he half-accused, half-begged. "Did you tell her?"

I stopped abruptly a step or two below him.

"Yes, I have seen her and I spoke with her about you."

"That she might be mistaken?"

"Yes. But I think that you are the one who has been mistaken. I can hardly believe that she is the one for whom you have been searching."

"Don't play with me," he said harshly. "I saw; I know."

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“What do you mean? You saw her? When? How? Why are you sure?”

“I walked out on the porch last night,” he explained, with an obvious effort at control. “I glanced in. She was sitting before the fire. I had only an oblique view through the curtains, but it seemed to be her face. Then I saw her hand plainly and *the ring*. I knew! You came in. I didn’t know what to do. I watched off and on through the evening. After you put out the lights I saw you go down the hall to your room. It’s lucky you did!” A fierce interjection. “I waited until I thought she would be asleep and not hear my footsteps. Then I came in to have it out with you! I acted on impulse—that’s my way! I didn’t know just what I meant to do but I intended to find out—and perhaps to punish! Your plain ignorance dashed me, left me simply bound to see her.

“That’s all the story. Now talk square to me. I’m not mistaken.”

“No,” I said carefully. “I can add a word

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about the ring. Inside it is engraved: 'George to Agnes.' "

"That's it," he flashed back. "I knew it was she. Her mother's ring."

The identification was complete—my first task. Now came the dangerous second undertaking—to turn him from her and not incidentally to turn his rage on me. Irrespective of all natural desire to avoid attack from this powerful wild man, I saw no possible benefit to the lady in question from having her faithful servant throttled and thrown downstairs. Of course, Curlew might be forced to flee the country but to me, in a hospital bed or still more dismal place, that would be a sorry triumph!

"I don't wish to be brutal," I said, "but she does not appear anxious to see you."

"She doesn't understand," he muttered.

"It isn't that, exactly," I replied. "I don't know how to explain her attitude to you, without upsetting you so that, with what I know and have heard about your temper, you are

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unlikely to hear me through. If you'll get hold of yourself I'll try."

He was actually shaking, his strong hands clasping and unclasping and the veins bulging out on his temples. So my demand was certainly reasonable.

"Go ahead," he commanded. "I'll do my part."

"First," I said, "you must understand that I never met her until last night. I found her in trouble—played out, starving in fact—and befriended her purely from a sentiment of common decency."

"For which I thank you," he said, tensely.

"I hadn't the faintest responsibility for the causes that brought her to such a pass."

He shuddered and an accusation leaped from his eyes with a flash as of a knife.

"What causes?" he demanded.

"Nor can I answer that. The lady has confided in me but little and that little unwillingly. She is again in the hands of friends and my interest in her need go no further." That was

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certainly an evasive statement. "But I promised to try to convey an idea to you and perhaps I owe it to you to do so."

"Can't you come to the point?" His thin restraint was crackling under the strain.

"If you don't get a grip on yourself there won't be any point," I responded indignantly. "If you think I'm going to meddle in an affair that doesn't concern me and tell a man in your state of mind something that will enrage him you're mistaken. I'll see you in the morning."

I made a move toward my door.

"Please," he said, stretching out his hand. "I'm under great strain, Mr. Winston, but I'll not forget myself."

While his softened mood lasted I hurried to the climax.

"You're not pursuing this woman for a crime, are you?"

"No."

"As I understand it you are pursuing her for just the other reason, because you look

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upon her as a pure, good woman; you desire to find her because she is such a woman, one who could be pursued as an ideal—such a woman as an honorable man might desire for a wife. Am I right?"

"Yes." He was twisting his hands again.

"Then my advice, which is her advice, is that you had better quit!"

A horrible moment passed, while the storm gathered.

"God"—he began in a low tone, broken with anger—"God"—he started again in a higher key—and then the cloudburst of his wrath swamped him utterly. He was in no way dangerous to me. Tossing his arms backward and forward he vainly struggled for words, for control of his nerveless muscles. His tanned skin became a ruddy bronze. At last he sank back against his door exhausted, clutching at his throat, pawing at his tangled hair.

Short, unrelated phrases came between his trembling lips.

"All my life—God knows—mistakes, mis-

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takes—my fault—years and years—never, never—finished, done—too late—”

His gaze fixed itself for a moment on me as I stood across the hall watching him anxiously.

“To-morrow,” he whispered. “To-morrow.”

He stumbled through his door and swung it shut behind him.

I turned the key and walked into my apartment.

My sister was standing in the center of her room! As I paused amazed in the doorway she lifted her eyes from the rumpled bed and stared at me, a personification of Zola’s historic: “J’accuse!”

CHAPTER VI

ENTER, THE FAMILY

“WHEN did you arrive?” I demanded. “Why didn’t you telegraph me?” There was some advantage in attacking first.

“About an hour ago,” she said curtly. “It appears that I should have telegraphed. I trust I’m not discommoding you!”

“Certainly not!” I proclaimed, disregarding her unkindly accent. “How was Mrs. Lerow and all the little Lerows? Mr. Lerow as plump as ever?”

“All very well,” she returned frigidly. “Pardon me, Gilbert, but I should much prefer if you would leave my room unoccupied in my absence!”

“Very well,” I said, vaguely, wholly at a loss as to whether to conceal or reveal. I had had no opportunity to anticipate this situation

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and think it out. It simply, suddenly was. "Of course, if you object to any friend of mine—" I stopped, appalled as she reached down slowly and removed a large hairpin from the significant hollow in the pillow. She inspected it carefully, looked at me steadily for a moment, twisting her lip in a most irritating manner, and then cast the unfortunate article into a convenient waste basket.

"A friend," she remarked with lifted eyebrows; "were it not vulgar curiosity, I should be much interested to know her name.—Yes, Mr. Lerow was as plump as ever. I believe you inquired about him." She turned casually toward her dressing table. The substantial lines of her well-corseted figure irritated me with their smug, silent assertion of complacent conventionality. She smoothed down her hips with an unconscious approbation of a body so fit as an expression of her ideas, of good substance, well-molded and pleasing, but neither alluring nor inspiring. She regarded herself as a conservative, but as a static mental

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condition is impossible and she shrank from progressive ideas, she exhibited a gentle intellectual retrogression which, as the years passed, alternately amused and irritated me. It would have saved me much discomfort could I have kept my recent adventure wholly from her, but since that was now impossible I must answer a hard question. Should I leave her free to indulge in untamed suspicions and self-justified in watchful distrust of all my actions, or should I give her a definite object of worry, insuring but limiting the inevitable vexation of her maternal vigilance?

“Dora,” I made a quick decision, “I have a very interesting story to tell you. I didn’t intend to tell you since I assumed, of course, you would misunderstand. A woman never accepts a man’s version of another woman’s troubles. If you will honestly try to get my point of view, I’ll explain this circumstantial evidence of nonexistent wickedness.”

“I shall probably get your point of view, Gilbert,” she answered, “but I can’t promise

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to agree with it. Go on with your calcimined scandal."

"There is no scandal," I snapped, "and I am not going to wield a whitewash brush. In few words, I found a woman starving in the park, brought her here and fed her. She was played out and slept for a short time in your room. Then she went away."

Dora eyed me skeptically. I was quite earnest and also honest, though hardly candid, I'll admit. But, with that infernal sense sometimes called "woman's intuition," she seemed to know that something was kept back. She began the inevitable cross-examination.

"The lady's age?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know," I was most vague. "She was no child, quite thin, not a beauty."

"Evidently attractive, however," she remarked inconsistently.

"Why on earth!" I began.

"Just your manner. You wished me to believe that she was an impossible subject for attraction, so I immediately assumed attrac-

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tion!" She smiled knowingly. Assault and battery suggested itself to me. "What is the lady's name?" she continued. "Does she live here or was she just passing through town? How did she happen to be starving? Where has she gone? Do you expect to see her again? Really I'm very excited, Gilbert. I'm just bursting with questions."

"So, I observe, but I don't like your attitude and see no reason for answering."

In the language of prize fighting, the gong had rung; the brother-sister battle which made a briefly exciting break in our household routine every few weeks was on! As usual in all domestic quarrels between male and female I found that I did not have the "punch" and finally "took the count," "threw up the sponge," turned a back somersault through a hoop and indulged in similar male confessions of defeat. She accomplished what she had set out to accomplish. She expected to. I expected to be beaten. So the result was inevitable. "The Female of the Species" is—un-

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doubtedly. I always take great comfort in Kipling after these bouts.

“Since you insist on making a mountain out of a mole-hill I’ll tell you the whole story,” was the form of my surrender. Whereupon I proceeded, with a wealth of detail which would have made an ant-heap resemble a Himalaya, to give the facts of the case, carefully varnished, omitting all reference to my psychological disturbances and any minor points that might suggest romantic interest. Dora was deeply, genuinely interested; at times sympathetic; but she became hardened again before I finished.

“Evidently his wife,” she pronounced firmly. “Probably she left him on account of some crime or something worse” (a vague possibility!) “and now he wants her to take him back. I’m glad to hear that her troubles are over, so that you need not play knight errant any more. It’s the sort of thing that I shouldn’t think would help anyone in the bonding business.”

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"You always have the weirdest idea of the sanctity of my business," I explained.

"I think you were very foolish," she continued, "to mix up in the affair further by carrying a message to her husband that she positively refused to see him." This had been my expurgated version. The other idea seemed to imply too much intimacy. Dora would never have understood. "Still, that's over with now."

"Yes, thank goodness!" I said. "Let's talk about something else. What kind of a time did you have East?"

"Very pleasant," she said. "Just one word more about this affair. Are you quite sure this girl didn't attract you considerably? Have you no further interest in her?"

"Now you are taking that motherly tone again," I answered heatedly. "I wish you would realize that you are three years younger than I am; that I have managed to exist for thirty-five years without ever taking your advice when it didn't agree with my own and I

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don't need it or ask it in regard to this affair."

"Of course, I have no influence with you," she said, self-pityingly, "which is very unfortunate. You made a terrible mess of that affair with Mrs. Bates, so that naturally the family is anxious whenever you seem started on anything queer."

"Hang the family," I decreed, viciously. "After everyone concerned has forgiven and forgotten the family still insists on conscientiously 'rubbing it in.' "

The Bates affair had been a harmless folly of my adolescence, which would have passed away of indifference, but in its dying moments an officious relative on my side had worked upon the feelings of an officious relative on the other side and a starving folly had been rapidly energized into a lusty transgression that only required the attention of the lewd press to mature into an inexcusable sin. Happily, through the combination of the sane Mr. Bates, the frank Mrs. Bates and my scared self—the only persons either properly or vitally interested—

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the fomentations of imaginative reporters had been avoided and the swollen folly neatly chloroformed and put out of its misery. Despite the fact that all the interested parties remain fast friends to this date my relatives have never wearied of citing "the Bates mess" as a sample of the sort of villainy to be expected of me should I ever be left without the services of the family prognosticators.

"You know that there never was any Bates affair," I added.

"I've heard both sides," she said, significantly.

"Yes, you've heard the wrong side and the outside," I retorted; "so you feel free to criticise the man inside. If you try to make a 'Bates mess' out of this affair, Dora, I shall move promptly. I don't intend that either Miss Littlefield or I shall be subjected to prying, gossipy annoyance."

"So, you expect to see her again!" she cried. "You intend to pay attentions to another married woman!"

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"She isn't married," my exasperation choked me. "If I wish to see her, whose business is it?"

"Apparently the man across the hall thinks it is his!" That shot hit where it hurt!

"I shall find out whether it is or not, before involving myself," I answered weakly.

"Assuming that he is only her divorced husband," said Dora irritatingly, "I judge that you have determined on serious attentions. That properly interests the family. Her name, you say, is Miss Littlefield. Where does she come from?"

"That is her affair," I replied sullenly.

"Evidently you don't know. Do you know anything about her family?"

"Certainly. Her brother-in-law is with a big Detroit concern, a director in a company here with which I do business. Know all about him." A slight exaggeration. "Rex Harbury is his name."

"Do you know him?"

"Not personally, but by reputation."

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“Still, I suppose if she said he was her brother-in-law that proves it. Of course, he wasn’t at the hotel when you called, but he had probably been there.”

“Dora,” I broke forth, “you are perfectly absurd. Do you think this woman would lie to me about things I could check up so quickly—even assuming that she would lie at all, which idea I distinctly resent?”

“I suppose not,” she replied calmly. “But the whole affair is so strange, Gilbert, starving woman, pursuing wild man, disappearing relatives, that it might be a game to drag an innocent man in pretty deep in a few days.”

Of course, that was a very nasty suggestion for Dora to make. No man likes to be made a fool or a tool. The whole business was queer. Curlew’s spotting her immediately upon her arrival at my house, his attack, her flight, her return, my second encounter, all followed each other in an order suggestive of an arranged scheme. Yet—everyone was so genuine; she certainly was worn out, half-starved; Curlew

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was obviously overwrought all the time; her subsequent secrecies and revelations were so natural. Well, if it were all a play it was such a one as a man is permitted to see and act in but few times in a life. I could not see that I had paid heavily as yet and certainly I was not going into the future blindly. Then the girl—Gwenn—no, no—no jealous sister could weaken my confidence in her. The whole play revolved around her; but she was no actress, she was sweet, honest womanhood clear through. I'd stake more than a domestic row on that. In my mental enthusiasm I slipped over the bounds of discretion on my first utterance.

“If that woman isn't the truest, purest, most lovable woman I've met in many a day my judgment of human nature is so worthless that I'd better quit the bonding business to-morrow. It will take more than family hallucinations to alter that opinion.”

“It's high time,” said Dora decisively, “that the family took an interest in this affair.”

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"It's high time you went to bed," I answered, pettishly. "In the morning light, you may see yourself, instead of your brother, in a foolish aspect."

"To-morrow I shall see Edith," she announced. "Perhaps you will listen to her."

"Tell Edith to talk to brother-in-law," I suggested. "Since you are going to drag all the family in, why leave out Carfax, the only sensible one in the lot?"

"You say that because he is a man," said Dora sagely. "He is too tolerant anyway, stands everything. Frankly, I think he stands too much from Edith. I've been meaning to speak to her about her last flirtation. I heard about it from—let me see—who was it?"

"Call her Mrs. Grundy," I said. "So Edith, dear sister Edith, who is to aid you in protecting me, is herself not quite up to standard? You must feel terribly isolated, Dora, away off there on that cloud-capped, ice-covered peak of perfect propriety. Go to bed, Dora. Have a good sleep. You won't feel your responsibili-

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ties so heavily in the morning. If you only had a sense of humor I should know that you'd burst out laughing at breakfast."

As I marched down the hall to my room she called after me defiantly:

"I have a sense of humor. But I shall go to see Edith, just the same!"

CHAPTER VII

A FOOTBALL GAME

AS I opened my door at about eight-thirty the next morning and stepped into the outer hall, the door opposite swung back. Curlew, who had evidently been watching again, confronted me. His eyes were clouded with red, the lines under them seemed deeper, his hair was rumpled, his clothes disordered, his collar soiled, cravat half-untied. His appearance bespoke plainly the man who had been up all night.

“Did you mean what you said last night, Mr. Winston?” he demanded.

“Yes,” I answered, “I meant just what I said, no more, no less.”

Looking into his miserable, passion-wrecked face it was almost impossible for me to persist in my deceitful assertion. This man’s spirit

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was in torment and its agony had bred bodily distress so plainly and pitifully exhibited on his drawn features and in his drooping neck that nothing seemed to justify me in refusing him relief.

“I am going away,” he said slowly. “After a time I shall return. Meanwhile I shall think it over. Do you expect to see her again?”

“I could,” I said. “Do you wish me to take a message?”

“Yes, please.” He drew a deep breath with apparent effort. “Tell her that I shall not bother her. But ask her—no—tell her I shall often think about things that are past and that I hope she will think about them, sometimes. After I’ve thought it all out I may come back—or I may not. If I come, I will seek you out, Mr. Winston, and I may ask you to carry another message to her.”

“I will do so gladly,” I replied, welcoming the opportunity to say something sincere and to offer even a small service to this unhappy man.

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“Thank you,” he said. “Good-bye.”

He turned and shuffled through his door, dragging himself wearily across the threshold. For a moment I glimpsed the grisly spectre of a smile that he strove to bring to his set lips as he nodded farewell. Then the closing door mercifully relieved me of the piteous sight.

From home to office I passed a most gloomy half-hour. Any conscientious man, deeply fond of a woman, yet finding his devotion to her desires the cause of wretchedness to others, must question himself severely. Was I blinded by physical attraction and unable to see the mental and moral weaknesses of my idol? This man whom she dreaded was plainly not all bad. She had said as much herself. It seemed as though it ought not to be necessary for her to shun him as a thing accursed, to refuse even to see him, to discourage him with a deception fraught with such pain—a pain that proved the strength of his attachment and the honesty of his purpose.

Her image, that constantly rose to oppose my

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doubts, I resolutely denied. Mere outward semblance should not influence me to believe in inward integrity! Yet deny as I would I felt her steadfast gray eyes fixed on me appealing, reproaching, wondering that one should be so deep in love, so shallow in faith.

With the constraint of conflicting thoughts upon me I went to meet her in the afternoon but at sight of her I knew that I had

. . . "given away
Mine ancient wisdom and austere control.
. . .
. . . lo! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance—
And must I lose my soul's inheritance?"

I suddenly realized that my precious "soul's inheritance" was to love and to be loved. Too long had I let that capital lie idle! Its investment would always be a speculation—the great gamble of life. But alike for the miser who hoarded and the spendthrift who wasted there would be beggary in the end. For everyone who was to live fully there must come a time

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for the splendid risk! That time had come to me.

"I have a message," was my greeting. "He is going away."

No flush of pleasure lit up her face. She looked at me uncertainly for a moment. Then her glance shifted.

"It was so cruel," she said. "Perhaps I did wrong."

Strange to say I had no impulse to inwardly rage at the inconsistency of woman. Instead, I felt brim full of joy. She, too, had had her hours of questioning the right to strike so hard a blow. \

"He is going to think it over. He may return."

"Poor old Jim," the words were hardly audible. "He's made a lot of trouble but he has always paid for it bitterly. I wish I could explain something, Mr. Winston," she said more plainly. "My relationship to his troubles is not as direct as you probably imagine. I'm not even negatively responsible." She paused,

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and then added in personal appeal. "Please believe that, won't you?"

"I will," I affirmed. To myself I swore a still more solemn oath that never again would I doubt her. Why? She had done nothing to dispel any doubts, but I somehow realized that while with her I should never be able to doubt, and so distrust in her absence must always be disloyalty. To preserve any self-respect I must have faith.

"Isn't there something you would like to do?" I asked. "The long afternoon is before us."

"I didn't understand that this was an afternoon engagement," she said, with an accent of mischief. "You promised to relieve my anxiety as early as possible. I expected then to put in the rest of the day fixing up my new room. I suppose you have regular plans for your Saturday afternoons. Did I keep you from golf?"

"No," I responded, "I have very few regular habits. At this time of year I go to a foot-

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ball game when I can. But I would like to put myself at your service if I can be serviceable." Then I added in deliberate unfairness. "My immediate usefulness may be over but while I don't wish to force my company on you, I wish you would accept it, if you will risk being bored. I'm a very prosaic person and realize it. Our recent common adventure was a dash of red in a dull gray life. Probably that's why"—I stopped; that excuse for clinging to her society would be too palpably insincere.

"I'm not evading your companionship," she asserted warmly. "You can't guess how welcome it is in my lonely life. I was giving you a chance to escape, if you wished to take it."

"You evidently forgot that we promised each other to be friends last night." Then I shifted hastily to safer ground. "I suppose it is too late for the theatre, but I'll try to get seats if you wish."

"Indoors, this gorgeous afternoon?" she said. "I'd love football, if there is a game and it isn't too late."

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“Are you trying to please me or yourself? There is a game.”

“No, I really would like to go.”

The crowded train and hurrying mob later on the sidewalk made conversation disjointed and unimportant until we had reached our seats in the grandstand. We had just laid claim to the thirty-two inches of slivery board allotted to us when the joyous roar, as the packed thousands rose and shrieked in unison, announced the kick-off. For the next ten minutes civil war possessed our stand, the excitable “stand-ups” and the comfort-loving “sit-downs” engaging in their weekly, verbal battle. The real combat in the field resolving itself soon into a close, hard struggle that lifted even the sedentary to their supposedly tired feet, the secondary contest in the audience resulted in speedy victory for the “stand-ups.” Whereat both my companion and I rejoiced, grinning at each other in cordial sympathy.

Naturally, people sit in the theatre, at concerts and during similar peaceful amusements.

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Even baseball games proceed at a moderate tempo, which permits of attention to bodily comfort. But long ago I gave up the idea that I could sit at a football game, except as a martyr. The shock of personal combat, the imminence of feats of skill and daring, the tremendous excitement of the great mob, the spectacular possibilities of every surging moment, all make too big an appeal to my emotions to allow even the muscular relaxation necessary to maintain a sitting posture. I must be on my feet, leaning with the runner or pressing against him. This, of course, requires that my neighbors understand the game and lean or press likewise. Otherwise they will be surprised at, and resent, my intrusions. But I have restored an indignant stranger to his seat beside me so often, after having unconsciously crowded him off and thrust him into another row, that I am quite hardened to my trespasses. The average spectator, moreover, neither expects nor makes excuses. He simply "follows the play" and trusts that some-

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where in the row a few hardy antagonists are "fighting it back." If not, the entire row is likely to be precipitated in one joyous heap after a successful assault upon the enemy's line.

In the frenzied, self-forgetful excitement of a bitter contest both Gwenn and I became most friendly. I always thought of her as Gwenn after the moment when she told me her name, so I am going to speak of her as I thought. We yelled in each other's unheeding ears the usual senseless remarks: "Look at him go"—when no one could be looking at anything else; "he's down; he's down"—reiteration of an obvious fact. We shook hands on brilliant tackles; we declaimed together to a deaf, declaiming audience our special joy in the miraculous dodging of the famous half-back. We gripped each others arms in straining minutes when the ball was carried relentlessly to within a yard of our goal. We howled joint relief when the mighty right leg of our kicker drove the battle line back forty-five yards.

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Yes, there was no doubt about it; she loved football. As a matter of fact I knew as I watched her flushed face that I could never have really loved a woman who knew the game and didn't love it. Surely only an anæmic could fail to find pleasure in the richness of physical sensations which football can inspire.

We were sitting comfortably exhausted during the intermission when she turned to me and said:

"Did he take it hard? Was he angry at you? How did you do it?"

"Oh, Curlew," I said, jolted back to sober things. "He didn't take it easily, but he held onto himself well. I used an evasive but pretty plain form of expression. I said that if he thought he was pursuing a pure, good woman, he'd better quit."

She looked away and the scarlet flowed over her neck and up into the tantalizing tendrils of hair that half-covered her neat, little ears. After a long time she looked back at me and said over her shoulder:

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“Does a lie rest very heavily on your conscience?”

“I’m not a good liar. But,” I asserted stoutly, “that deception hasn’t worried me. It was so necessary to disturb him and too preposterous to bother anyone else.”

“Thank you—twice,” she said.

Happily the squads returned for the second half at this moment and our common embarrassment was soon lost in our common anxiety for the local team, on whom their opponents had scored by a clever trick within the first two minutes of play. Again we swayed and shouted in the rare abandon so seldom permitted to the sober citizen yet so deeply restful for his taut nerves. The struggle on the field became more absorbing every moment and, lifted out of the starchy forms of early acquaintance, we rollicked like old friends over the exciting incidents of play. It was one of those rare games that justify the typical magazine football story.

With but a few minutes left the home team

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tied the score and the quivering stands cast forth great splashes of maroon, surging backwards and forwards and impotently bellowing their joy. Then just before the whistle blew a brave young maniac broke from a struggling group and sped tortuously across the field. He slipped, we groaned, he recovered, we shrieked, he dodged and then, even as we implored him to go on, a diving enemy gripped him around his struggling knees and he went down under a heap of plunging men! The pile was slowly disentangled, a few arms waved vaguely above it, the crowd cheered feebly in its uncertainty. Then a frenzied player flung himself out of the ruck, tossing his arms above him; a great cry arose, swept on into a mighty volume of glad noise. The ball was over the line! The referee was blowing his whistle!

Suddenly it occurred to me that Gwenn and I were dancing up and down shouting at each other in a most absurd way. The same thought was occurring to others near us about their own actions. The stand hushed quickly.

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People moved slowly toward the exits. It was all over. It was only a game after all. We had forgotten proportions. We had been excitably silly people. We promptly became sedately silly people pretending that nothing important had happened. Yet down in our hearts we knew that something very important had happened.

Ten thousand people had been swept together in a big, pure, uplifting emotion—joy over all that makes for hope and progress, joy over youth with its fine, reckless courage, its quick wit and nimble heels, its willingness to do to the utmost what is to be done without counting the cost or asking the reason! Something had happened to ten thousand people of much greater importance than the election of another fat, stupid, honest man to public office or defeating him in favor of a thin, clever, crooked one. Why should I be ashamed of the deep pleasure that I felt?

“It was a great game, wasn’t it?” I said defiantly.

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“A splendid game.” She smiled contentedly.

She would not let me accompany her home, insisting pleasantly but firmly that she preferred not. So I put her on the street-car and strolled slowly homeward along the crowded sidewalks. She seemed much nearer to me after the intimate excitements of the afternoon, not at all like a recent acquaintance or an unknown. Where she had come from I still did not know, but she was here, in my town, in my life, and I was glad of it. Let sisters worry if they would! The thought slapped me in the face with the sting of a wet cloth. My two sweet sisters were probably discussing me at home and preparing cold, damp blankets for their fevered brother. In their eyes I was a sick man needing kind but heroic treatment and careful dosing. It was useless to put off the hour of diagnosis and prescription. I marched into the house resolved to endure patiently the consultation, but to refuse firmly to swallow the conventional nostrums.

CHAPTER VIII

SISTER EDITH'S AFFAIR

WITH a feeling of shamefaced relief, I found the apartment empty. Yet having determined upon combat I walked around aimlessly for a few minutes discontented with the idea of quietly amusing myself. Then I recollected a rather disagreeable letter which I had been putting off writing to a friend with whose moral conduct I had officiously concerned myself. This would provide an outlet for my militant emotions. Leaving the door ajar to give me a glimpse of the open fire I sat down at my desk in the miniature "library," which opened out from the living room, and was soon deep in the pleasure of pointing out to a misguided fellow the folly of his course.

A quarter of an hour later my sisters entered the apartment acrimoniously indulging in that

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tiresome form of talk known as "having it out." In other words they had reached that stage of intimate dispute where polite formalities and sensible restraint had been discarded as handicaps upon the hammer and chisel method of conviction.

"To get down to brass tacks," announced Dora in a battering tone, "you are simply making a silly fool of yourself."

"That is a matter which concerns only three persons," replied Edith, interposing chilled steel between herself and the imminent tacks, "George and me and R. H."

"It's all very well for you to say it only concerns you three," struck back Dora, "but I say that the family has also some interest, when you insist on stirring up scandal."

I grinned comfortably. Another of the family was in disrepute. It appeared that Dora's virtuous isolation was lonelier than I had supposed. But Edith's response put a sudden stop to my rising amusement.

"I'm not stirring up scandal," she said.

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"Everything has been done most quietly. R. H. and I have done nothing indiscreet. We have simply learned that each of us made a mistake when he married. George and I have never had any hard words, no nasty rows, but we have drifted apart and now that R. H. and I have met I realize why it was to be. George understands how I feel. He says that if I am sure that R. H. is the man he will never stand in the way of my happiness. It is all open and above board."

"How about Mrs. R. H.?" This time Dora hit a tack squarely on the head. "Has she also an affinity?"

"Oh, she's a silly thing," said Edith loftily. "I don't suppose she is really capable of having a big feeling for anybody. She may think she is fond of R. H. in a weak way but she would feel the same way toward any man who was kind and took care of her."

I had a coarse brotherly impulse to step out suddenly and slap her, but happily remained quiet.

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"The description of his wife by the noble R. H.?" queried Dora.

"Of course not, he never speaks of her except most generously and affectionately. But I've seen her once or twice. She's not big enough for him!"

"And you are?"

"I don't say that," a voice of saccharine humility, "but I appreciate him. I see how large he is and it would be a wonderful thing for me to make myself a fitting companion. He's working on these efficiency problems now, he showed me how to increase fifty per cent. the amount of work each employé could do in a day. In a big factory this makes a difference of hundreds of thousands a year. It's very interesting. I'm reading up on it. You see, it benefits the workman. They have a prize system and each man gets ten per cent. more in wages for every fifty per cent. increase in efficiency."

"Bother!" snapped Dora, striking out blindly. "You talked the same way about

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George's wonderful ideas in the practice of law, when you were engaged. You were reading up on that, too!"

"That's very different," said Edith indignantly. "Law is a very tiresome, dry study and it gets duller the more you read. But R. H.'s business grows more exciting the more I learn about it. He took me over their plant one day. It was most amusing and entertaining, everybody rushing around, ordering other people here and there and everyone so attentive to R. H. He's a big man in his business, you know."

"Yes, yes," said Dora wearily, "he seems to be very big, everything about him is big except it never appeals to me as very big to be paying attentions to another man's wife and particularly when you have a wife of your own, who trusts you."

"That's human nature," affirmed Edith complacently. Again I restrained the eager palm that itched to administer fitting rebuke. "We don't know why things are, we just find them as

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they are and must take them that way. I can't help liking him. Being married doesn't change men or women. We want to be happy just the same. We want to be with someone who makes us happy."

"Quit snivelling," commanded Dora. "I never supposed when I ventured to suggest that you were overdoing this business of visiting dear schoolmate Clara, that there was anything serious in the affair. I knew your Detroit excursions weren't the results of yearning to see Clara but I didn't believe all the silly gossip I heard about this married man, whom you were seen with so much, until you became maudlin over R. H."

"Who gossiped?" asked Edith. "I'd like to know whose business it was, anyway. I haven't done anything I'm ashamed of. If a woman can't be seen twice with a man without being gossiped about—"

"You are too funny for anything," broke in Dora with a derisive cackle. "You admit to me a far more serious situation than anyone

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has suggested and then demand to know why gossip should attack your sacred person."

"But I haven't done anything that should be gossiped about," insisted Edith. "What's the use talking? You are so unreasonable, Dora."

"Yes, I'm unreasonable," assented Dora, returning vigorously to the "brass tacks." "I have a silly sister married to a man far too good for her, running after a disloyal husband of a woman probably far too good for him. If Mrs. R. H. and George could only get crazy about each other I believe I'd help a double divorce and double marriage. That would make one decent couple at least. But that's absurd."

"The fact is I think George ought to put his house in order. You talk as if he knew everything. I doubt it. If he doesn't I'm going to tell him. And if he does I'm going to give him a piece of my mind."

"You needn't do that," I said, pushing open the door of my room and getting considerable

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amusement out of the surprise at my appearance. "I'll speak to George myself. I'm ashamed of you, Edie; there's little excuse for a woman with a husband like George Carfax."

"You stupid men," said Edith. "The kind of a husband hasn't anything to do with it. It makes it harder. It makes one slower to act. If I'd been married to a brute I'd have left long ago. Some of the nicest men I've known have had no characters; I couldn't respect them, but I liked them. Some of the biggest bores I've known have been models of virtue and I hated them."

"I suppose ability and value make no appeal to a woman," I began bitterly.

"To a woman!" she interrupted, scornfully. "How about a man? Do you waste a thought on a girl like Lottie Dinsley who works herself to death morning, noon and night to take care of her mother and to pay her father's debts? But you make yourself ridiculous chasing that painted Miss Popham all over the

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ballroom to get the seventh extra waltz on her program."

"Well, really, that isn't logic," I started again, bravely.

"No, it isn't logic," she assented. "It's just fact. We like. We don't like. We fall in love and get over it. Some people think that after we get over it we must keep on pretending. I don't. I live and let live until a man comes along who seems like the real thing. Then I say: Now what am I to do? My husband doesn't need me. He doesn't even want me. All he wants is his dusty old books and his tiresome cases. We've no children—it's just a question between him and me. I'm thinking it over, trying to think it out decently, to act in a careful, respectable manner. Then the family arrives on the scene—Dora with her icy intellect, you with your fixed formulas—oh, I hear you've had a shake-up recently!"

"Don't discuss me," I said shortly.

"No, don't discuss me," she mocked. "Let's talk about wicked sister! Sister is still per-

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fectly respectable, able to take care of herself! But I understand that a mysterious adventuress has you in her toils. A married lady, too! And you so harsh about my interest in a married man! It would be funny if it didn't make me so mad."

She picked up the coat and long marabou stole which she had cast off on coming into the room. I held the smart, expensive garment while she slipped into it with that unconscious shrug of pride with which the well-dressed woman assumes her clothing, even in turbulent moments. I had a momentary vision of an angry man jerking on his overcoat and smiled at the contrast.

"Shall I?"—I glanced out of the windows. It was already quite dark.

"No, I came up in the machine," she replied stiffly. "Don't bother to come downstairs. Good-bye."

In the hall she turned to speed a last arrow into my lacerated hide.

"I leave you to each other. Give Dora a

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book of poems, Gilbert, sweet, passionate poems; if she has any red blood it needs to be stirred up regularly. It's getting clotted. For yourself I suggest a few dime novels to familiarize you with the ways of adventures, to be followed by an essay—or perhaps a curtain lecture by Dora—on Discretion!”

Then she slammed the door.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAMILY RESCUE LEAGUE

DORA and I, a bit abashed by Edith's attack on our common interpretation of the rules of the game, tacitly declared a truce in our quarrel. We passed a very satisfactory evening in alternately scoring easy victories over straw defenses set up by each in turn representing the absent culprit.

"She doesn't consider for a moment her obligations to George," Dora would say.

"Of course, she takes the position that George does not wish to hold her to those obligations."

"The highest obligations we owe are to those who would not hold us to them," Dora would reply.

"Still, to hold us silently against our desires is as much a restraint as an audible demand."

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“That isn’t his restraint. That’s her own sense of decency fighting against willful appetite.”

“It all depends on what you call appetite and what is a divine instinct to live fully,” would be my weak return.

“Instinct!” Dora would echo. “An appetite for self-gratification need never be confused with a divine instinct.”

“Of course, you are right,” I would remark, gleefully surrendering my betrayed forces. Some people call this sort of thing “a real good talk.” It is probably the most effective way ever discovered for giving strength to ignorance and prejudice. People pass evenings around the banquet table “hearing both sides” in this manner and go away convinced that the tissue-paper thoughts with which they arrived have survived the ordeal of fire and are pure asbestos.

About half past ten Dora and I organized the Family Rescue League and appointed me its delegate to carry our resolutions to the

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wronged husband. After which we retired to our respective rooms for the sleep which is supposed ever to be the reward of virtue.

As a result of this action, at eleven-thirty Monday morning, I entered George's office, on the sixteenth floor of the National Bank Building, in a very uncomfortable mental condition. The glow of the former evening's virtue had quite departed. I realized that Edith had probably enlarged imaginatively upon my interest in Gwenn Fenton and I was hardly the ideal representative of the Family Rescue League. I wished that the impeccable Dora had been appointed. Also George Carfax was not an easy person to approach on such a mission as mine.

He was a genial, resolute man with a soul big enough to fill more than the massive body which was the traditional Carfax physique. He had a panoramic vision which took in many things around any point presented and made it very difficult to focus his entire thought on one small idea. I had found, for example, on a previous occasion that it was hard to get

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him to appreciate properly the value of a certain achievement of a local politician. He had insisted on referring to what he called "twenty years of scoundrelism" and refused to be impressed by the lonesome virtuous act. I had retired from that interview without George's endorsement for my candidate, but with a sense of something cheap and silly in my effort to obtain it. I did not relish repeating the experience in this more delicate matter.

"Sorry I couldn't make it lunch to-day, Gilbert," Carfax said, as we shook hands. "I've a fool committee meeting on hand, a gathering of public-spirited business men to urge the city council to improve conditions back of the Yards. I shall probably advise them to quit contributing to the campaign funds that elect crooks to represent that district, as first aid to the injured. That will prevent them from appointing me on any subcommittee to waste more of my time!"

He chuckled joyously and rumbled his hair in his customary manner. Despite constant bar-

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bering his light brown thatch grew thickly and was always in confusion.

“Still working with the uplift and laughing at it,” I observed. “Well, George, I came here to talk to you about social conditions nearer home.”

“You think I’ve been listening to Edith’s wild tales of your recent romance and you want to explain that there’s nothing in it!” he announced to my great confusion. He was much amused.

“You’re quite mistaken,” I stammered.

“Then there is something in it!” His amusement increased.

“I didn’t come to talk about myself,” I said, irritably. “It’s hard for me to say just what I wish to say, especially in these businesslike surroundings. It isn’t business, but I couldn’t see you at home very well.” I paused uncertainly and then plunged. “Fact is, Dora and I have been worried about Edith.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Oh, I suppose it isn’t really serious but we

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think she is a little too much interested in a certain man, who isn't her husband. We don't believe the affair is exactly important but perhaps it needs just a little firmness on your part to—to—"

"To give it a real importance?" he suggested.

"No," I answered, absurdly, "but I don't believe you understand Edith. You see her too much through—"

"Through fond eyes?" he asked gently. "That's the best way to see most people, I believe, the fairest, most helpful way."

"There may be two opinions about that," I retorted.

"Yes, there may be," he said. "It happens that I hold only one."

"Very well. Even through those eyes do you care to see her entangling herself with another? Do you think a mistake of that kind will bring her anything but misery?"

"I don't know," he said, simply. "I don't

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know that she is entangling herself. I think the gentleman in question is a pretty decent kind of a man, as men go. Of course, he hasn't the clean, fine grain, with which every man better than a criminal credits himself, but he's sound wood, an average blockhead, not all rotten under the bark as you seem to think."

"You know him?"

"Slightly. I know more about him. I always inform myself about Edith's best friends, as they come and go. I've watched a lot of weedy friendships grow and wither. I could have nourished many a feeble curiosity into strong interest with opposition. But I didn't."

"So your detachment isn't carelessness, it's policy."

"Partly. You see, Gilbert, I'm an unexciting, rather steady-going person, not much of a play-fellow. So I realize that Edith with her gay spirits and love of a lot of things that, candidly, bore me to death, must have playmates besides me, people who enjoy the little games."

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“Don’t you enjoy any of the little games? I don’t think everything that isn’t serious is useless.”

“Neither do I. But, take dancing; I’m not such a poor dancer. But I can’t enthuse over a cotillion, discuss it for days before and after—and pine for what was not.”

“That happens to be my attitude, too, so I can’t argue with you.”

“Then I’ll try to find your tender spot,” he grinned pleasantly. “You’re a bit fond of the table. So am I. Yet I can’t drown the sorrows that follow a long evening of overfeeding and overdrinking with memories of the joyous antics of a lot of people who call themselves ‘good sports,’ in unconscious irony apparently, because they are neither sports nor sportsmen and their great aim is to appear wicked. I’m not spontaneously joyful over such ideals of ‘real living’; so naturally I expect Edith to enjoy the companionship of the ‘gay dogs,’ who help keep the wolf from the door.”

“Keep the wolf from the door!” I objected,

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remembering my many arguments with Edith over her lavish entertainments. "You mean, who bring the wolf to the door."

"Well, now you mention it," he laughed. "I have noted that the wolf is usually following close on the trail of the gay dog. To complete the metaphor, however, let me observe that gay dogs come and go but Edith still seems to give a mild affection and trust to old dog Tray."

"I suppose the fact that the gay dog is married makes no difference in your attitude!" I felt rather indignant.

"Not the slightest! Sometimes it gives me the pleasure of flirting mildly with his wife which may prevent her from feeling neglected and usually arouses a most amusing opposition from both the gay dog and Edith."

"I don't know that I can discuss this matter to any purpose with you," I proclaimed, all the set prejudices of the bachelor against married freedom clamoring for utterance, "if your view of the obligations of husband and wife to

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each other is so loose. I suppose you call it, broad."

"Obligations?" he considered them slowly. "Restrictions of the will accepted for the sake of peace? I recognize no such obligations."

"Call them loyalties," I was much nettled. "They can't be broken or the comfort of the family and of society is destroyed."

"Surely," he assented. "But when they are broken the relationship is broken. You can't cement a broken loyalty together. All that remains to be done is to brush the fragments into a judicial dustpan and obtain a legal announcement of the smash."

"Is there any harm in trying to prevent the smash?" I inquired with sledge-hammer sarcasm.

"Yes," he retorted, "there is. The sure way to have a smash is to try to prevent one. Wait a minute! You're full of fight but I want the floor. This is my pet hobby."

"Go on."

"The strongest influence in the world to re-

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tain loyalty is to be worthy of it; if possible to be so worthy of it that a yellow dog would be ashamed to snap at you. I believe that if a man is straight and square according to his lights, fulfilling his obligations, according to his honest estimate of his capacity, that's all he can do to attract loyalty. Everything else is going to drive it away."

"It sounds mighty well, George," I said truculently; "but I think a little courage and masterfulness are not to be despised."

"Courage!" roared George mirthfully. "You're a bachelor, a man who doesn't dare to get married. You talk of courage to a married man! For a sensitive, affectionate man deliberately to oppose his wife day after day, insisting upon his right to rule himself, not her but himself, is a continuous exhibition of courage that makes every military hero of history a second-rater. Kipling explains the married soldier's courage by saying: 'e fights for two.' Rubbish! He's been fighting a fight that makes mere war a pastime. He's

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been risking not broken bones, but a broken spirit."

"You seem to feel very harshly all of a sudden about women," I commented.

"Not a bit," he asserted. "The wife must fight just as hard for her soul. Only she has one divine aid. When she holds a little kid in her arms she realizes that she can do things so much more important than anything a mere man can do that she becomes invincible. She wins right there for herself; and she's likely to get so absorbed in herself that she'll let the man alone. It's those like Edith and I who have no children who keep on fighting each other."

"Haven't we drifted away from our topic?" I suggested.

"No," he said, "here's the point. She's fighting for herself. I'm fighting for myself. As long as I respect her right to her own soul we can fight the rest of the world together. But suppose I begin to oppose her self-mastery. I'd be attacking the very foundation of her

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loyalty to me, the confidence that one person at least in all the world is fond enough of her, believes enough in her, to wish her to be herself."

"You seem to think people marry to be let alone."

"If they do they're grievously disappointed. Excuse me a minute. That reminds me of something."

He picked up the telephone and said to the switchboard operator: "Call Mrs. Carfax. If you don't find her at home try Madame Cutine—yes, the hairdresser."

"No," he resumed, "my idea is that when two people fall in love they feel that means desire for the loved one to hold and grow in the personality that charms the lover. I may criticise Edith about little things but fundamentally I want her just as she is. In other words *she* is very dear to me. She feels that and knows that she is safe with me. I don't want to change her to something she doesn't wish to be. She is under obligation to herself

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to prove that that which she is, and which I love, is an admirable soul. If I tried to bully her into believing that her soul was a weak thing that needed guidance, what would be the use of loyalty? Her conclusion would be that the more loyal she was to me the less I would think of her."

The telephone rang.

"Not at either place?" he inquired. "Then try Mme. Blanchette, the milliner and Smith-Stevens—no, no—*Smith-Stevens*, ladies' tailors. You'll find the phone numbers in my bill box, one has been recently changed . . . yes, thank you."

"Sorry to interrupt," he explained, "but I promised to phone Edith this morning if a man was coming up to dinner. I forgot it until too late for the manicure engagement. Now I'm guessing."

"Why doesn't she call you up?" I asked.

"Because I promised to phone her. She was going to be very busy this morning." He said it without a smile.

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Again the bell rang.

“Well, well, I’m glad to have located you,” said Carfax. “Yes, he’s coming— In a great hurry?— Friend of yours is here— Well, not as much of a friend as that— No, just a relative— Right the first time! ’Tis Gilbert himself looking just as safe and wealthy as one of his own bonds— You think I ought to warn him about whom?— Don’t know the lady’s name! Really I can’t warn him against the whole world of women. There are a few decent ones, you know— Yes, he’s listening closely to every word.”

“I’m not,” I snapped resentfully.

“Guess I was wrong, Edith,” he continued sweetly. “He says he’s not listening, but he can’t help hearing— No, he can’t hear *you*. Would you like him to?— No, I thought not— Certainly not!— I’d hate to have him hear that!— You do feel genuinely concerned though?— The lady has no past to speak of? How did you mean that?— Beg pardon. I didn’t realize how serious I should be. I

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thought I was quite funny— Oh, yes, I see. Just a minute—

“She says it’s too serious a matter to joke about, Gilbert. Have you any little retort you would like me to convey?” George was having a great deal of fun apparently.

“Tell her that everything I’m doing is open and above board; that she would do well to act likewise.”

“Here’s a terrible message,” said Carfax. “Hate to give it to a lady. Gilbert says he is setting an example of acting open and above board that you would do well to follow!— Of course, quite right. I’ll tell him!

“She says that she does not care to discuss her private affairs over the telephone!”

I lost my temper.

“Then tell her to quit discussing mine!”

Carfax chuckled and repeated the message.

“Yes, that’s what he said— I thought of that, too— If his affairs are open and above board why not over the phone?— Perfect reply— Naturally you don’t care to discuss *your*

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affairs— No, I'm not trying to be nasty!— Yes, dear— Yes, I'll use my influence with brother!— Yes, yes— I'll try to show him— He'll appreciate your interest, I know!"

He turned away from the telephone and confronted me solemnly.

"I've just promised my wife to urge you to abandon the pursuit of this mysterious woman. I don't know her name. Neither does Edith; but we know it must be a mistake because, of course, we would know the name of any lady whom you ought to pursue. Shall I give you a list of eligibles?"

"Confound you! I didn't come here for advice. I came to give some advice. It isn't wanted. I'll go."

"That's hardly fair," he said, the corners of his eyes twitching with amusement. "I listen patiently to you and then you refuse to hear me."

"You old fraud!" I snorted affectionately. "I haven't talked five minutes. I've listened patiently to you concerning my advice to you

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but I'll be hanged if I'll listen to you concerning your advice to me. You don't know what you are talking about."

"Nor did you when you came in here. That's the reason I did the talking for you. Now you want to talk for yourself."

"No, I'm not going to talk. I'm going to lunch. Are you ready to go?"

"Just a minute," he said, fumbling over a few papers. "I'll sign these letters."

As we stepped into the outer hall the elevator stopped on our floor and Curlew literally bounded out of it (for all the world like a discarded memory leaping from the pit of forgotten trouble). He rushed up to me and seized me by the arm.

"I'm catching a train," he panted. "Just came from your office. They said you were here. Thought of something at the last moment. Maybe you're deceiving me. I don't know. I've taken your word. But I shall find out even if I'm not here. If you're square

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with me you'll keep away from her. You owe that to me, anyhow. You keep away!"

I edged off from brother-in-law, who was carefully observing a blank wall.

"Mr. Curlew," I said quietly, "if I owe anything to you—"

"I mean this, I believed you were disinterested, that you meant what you said honestly. But you might be deceived. So I've arranged to find out about her. Then I thought, suppose I find you are still mixed up on the affair. What shall I think of you? I shall distrust you. I shall look further. I speak plainly."

"You always do," I said, assuming jauntiness.

"I'll speak more plainly," his voice rose. "By God! It will go hard with you if you've deceived me."

A car stopped at our floor.

"Down!" yelled Curlew. He sprang to the open door and, momentarily blocked it against the elevator boy, he turned and shouted:

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“Maybe I’m wrong! Train going! No time!
But you keep away!”

The gate slammed. I turned to face an
amused but somewhat worried brother-in-law.

CHAPTER X

THE PLEASURES OF MEDDLING

“YOUR friend is a lively person,” he observed mildly.

“Did you hear what he said?”

“It would have been difficult not to hear!”

“Of course it would. He was speaking of her—”

“The woman from nowhere?”

“Why do you call her that?”

“I believe I am quoting from Edith.”

Another elevator paused invitingly before us. Entering automatically we were forced into silence until we reached the main floor.

“Let’s go across the street to that little cigar store,” suggested Carfax. “My lunch can wait a bit. I think you want to say something and I know that I do.”

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We found a quiet spot in the rear of "Dick's Place" and I continued my explanation.

"That man means all right, George, but he has an excitable disposition and no control. We parted good friends last Saturday but between now and then a suspicion has arisen within him so he rushes up to me on his way to the station to blurt it out. Queer chap."

"I don't wish to seem inquisitive," said Carfax, "but—how closely related is he to Miss—what did you say her name was?"

"I didn't say," I answered with an embarrassed chuckle.

"That's so, that's so." He stroked his knee gently and waited. "And the relation, is that also secret?"

"It is from me. I really do not know. He is a man who has known her for many years. That's all I can say."

"I'm not just plain curious," said Carfax, "though I understand now why the ladies are so feverishly interested in the affair. The fact is that I'm trying to place that man. Some-

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where I've seen him or someone like him under tense circumstances. I don't feel that the situation was to his credit. Yet I have no recollection of repulsion either. I just feel that he's dangerous."

"I can assure you that he is," I remarked with feeling. "He's a distinctly dangerous man, but I don't believe that he's a bad one."

"Exactly my feeling," said Carfax. "I hope the mysterious lady is not of the same type."

"Hardly."

"Well, it's none of my affair," he said, rising. Then he broke into noisy laughter. "This is really awfully funny. You drop in on me to give me a friendly warning about a possible disturbance in my peaceful household. Yet, you yourself are being pursued by a regular stage villain who warns you against attentions to the beautiful unknown. You remind me of an automobilist who passed a farmer friend of mine who was driving peacefully to town. The speed-fiend was going fifty miles an hour and had only two wheels on the road,

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but he yelled back to the farmer that his horse was lame, just before the car skidded into the ditch!"

"I note your hint," I remarked, "but I'm not bound for the ditch!"

"That's the spirit," laughed Carfax. "I shouldn't be surprised, if the women nag you enough, to see you grit your teeth and propose. It needs a real romance to drag a man of your stolid age and comfortable habits down on his patellas."

"I'm not there yet!" I proclaimed.

"Ho! Ho!" roared Carfax derisively as we parted on the sidewalk. "Boasting of your resistance! You'll be an easy victim! Another wedding present before spring! I'll tell Edith to begin shopping for a hall-clock right away."

He departed joyously.

The delegate of the Family Rescue League spent a gloomy hour over his lonely luncheon trying to concoct the satisfactory report of progress to "Madam President," which she

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would expect to receive that evening. All afternoon I struggled with the problem and when sister fixed a stern eye upon me from across the dinner table I was still unprepared.

"George is a difficult man to deal with," I began apologetically. Of course, that was a tactical error. "He hardly listens to you and then plunges at once into one of his elaborate theories. It's terribly hard to argue with a man full of theories. You can't keep him on one subject."

"I judge that you didn't make much impression. I suppose George took it all as a joke coming from you," said Dora, jabbing viciously at a pickled pear.

"Why as a joke from me?"

"Oh, your recent conduct hardly gives tone to any moral pose by you. I realized to-day that I should have gone myself but thought you might as well try your hand."

"Well, I can assure you," I began indignantly, "that George didn't take any such silly attitude as you and Edith do. He's too much

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of a man to presume to interfere in another man's private affairs."

The telephone bell rang. Dora stepped into the hall where the instrument stood on a settee built into the wall.

"Yes," she said, "this is I, Edith— What's that?— Hold the wire just a minute."

She put down the receiver and came to the dining room. She looked more than usually correct and corrective. She spoke with deliberate malice in each changing tone of her voice.

"Edith says that George tells her something very funny occurred to-day. She screams so with laughter I can't understand it all, but I gather that Mr. Curlew is still pursuing you."

"Why, confound him!" I cried, jumping up from the table. "Let me talk to George."

I strode out and seized the telephone.

"Edith," I said, "kindly ask George to come to the phone— No, I don't wish to speak to

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you. Will you please ask George?— Thank you.”

The receiver stuttered in my ear, increasing my annoyance with the thought that someone else might be on the line. Then there was a sudden silence. I was sure that “central” had disconnected me. Dora was giggling over by the dining room door.

“Why don’t you go back and finish dinner?” I demanded.

“I was talking,” she said coolly. “You took my call and dismissed my party. I’m waiting till your lordship is through. Besides it amuses me.”

“This is George,” said a thin voice.

“Beastly connection,” I shouted. “Can you hear me?”

“Yes,” came the vigorous answer as the connection suddenly cleared with an ear-racking crack.

“Why did you tell these cackling women about that little incident in your building? I don’t think that was very decent.”

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“Why not?”

“Well, the thing was rather confidential!”

“I don’t recollect,” said George calmly, “that you confided anything to me this morning—except—yes, you confided to me the opinions of your household with regard to this household.”

“I trust you didn’t take offense!”

“Certainly not. I believe in free speech. That’s why I thought Edith and I had the same right to talk about your affairs that you and Dora had to talk about Edith’s. Of course, I wouldn’t give away a confidence. If you regard Mr. Curlew’s advice to you to ‘keep away,’ as confidential, despite the presence of an elevator full of strangers, I’ll expunge it from the record!”

“You go hang,” I said half-cross, half-amused. “The whole family is a joke.”

“It certainly is,” said Carfax mockingly. “I’m glad you see the point!”

“I’m going back to dinner,” I announced. “Does Edith want to speak to Dora?”

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"Edith's welcoming guests," said George.
"How's Dora's sense of humor?"

"Better than usual," I said. "Thanks to you! Good-bye."

"You're much obliged!" said George.

"Nice cold dinner," was my opening remark on reseating myself at the table.

"That's hardly my fault," replied Dora.
"Gilbert, it seems to me very strange that this man Curlew should be following you around if that woman were—"

"In the name of sacred charity!" I expostulated, "let's stop discussing 'that woman'! Let's quit discussing Edith and George and me. Let's have a little peace!"

"Of course, if you are going to lose your temper," she spoke very plaintively. "There's no use trying to discuss anything with you."

"Very well," I said ungraciously, "please understand that I'm going to lose and have lost my temper and that it will stay lost as long as this subject abides with us."

"Do you wish coffee, to-night?" she inquired.

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“Yes, I have some work to do.”

“I’ll tell Hilda to serve it in front.” The maid’s entry provided me with a new topic.

“Her vacation did her good,” I said as she left the room. “It would have been foolish for her to have stayed here and lost the chance to be with her sister.”

“Man’s point of view!” said Dora. “The place got in a fearful state. We’re still trying to catch up with the cleaning. Keeping a house clean in Chicago is like brushing the snow off while it falls. It seems a futile struggle but if you relax effort for a few days the job becomes monumental.”

The meal ended in one of those footless discussions of the burden and expense of living in a dirty city that are so popular in Chicago families. The patient, soot-streaked face of the returning citizen must be a nightly civic inspiration for his impatient, dirt-combating wife. The suffragette spouse can not but feel renewed assurance in the justice of her cause as she observes the inefficiency of masculine

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government so neatly symbolized in the dirty collar.

The coffee-drinking rite concluded, I retired to my library to work. Perhaps that is hardly a fair statement. I was about to write my first letter to Gwenn. The meeting with Curlew was my excuse. I began carefully:

“MY DEAR MISS LITTLEFIELD:—

An unexpected encounter—”

Then I paused. It seemed a bit too formal. I tore it up. I spent an hour or so writing and tearing up letters. Then a real thought came to me. I destroyed my last four page effort and wrote:

“MY DEAR MISS LITTLEFIELD:—

Something has happened of sufficient importance so that I feel I ought to have a little talk with you. It is nothing to alarm you, but you should be informed. May I call to-morrow (Tuesday) evening? Will you telephone me if this is inconvenient? If I do not hear from you I shall appear.

Sincerely yours,

GILBERT WINSTON.”

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I posted that letter with much enjoyment. I should see her in the evening. She was almost certain to have no engagement, so my suggestion of telephoning was a mere formality.

I felt so good natured that when I returned to the apartment I astonished Dora by kissing her good-night, as she sat drowsing over a book in front of the fireplace.

After I had retired I found myself less sleepy than I had supposed. "Coffee," I accused myself. So I reached up to turn on the light and by that action brought vigorously back to mind the startling events of a few nights before. Again I could feel Curlew's lean, strong hand clutch my wrist. My thoughts slipped back to the hour with her when she told me her pathetic little story, the chain of circumstances that brought her into my hearth light from the World Outside.

To-morrow I should see her again! It had been two days since I had watched her questioning smile gladden the drooping mouth, noted how heightened interest opened wide her won-

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dering eyes, and tingled when she met my gaze full and square. Like a boy of eighteen I rehearsed and rehearsed with renewed delight each sharp memory of some word, or look or action, that had left a special impress. I was a boy of eighteen. I had known brief passions before, but never utter devotion of spirit. Whether such ardor comes first at eighteen or thirty-five, it demands, it calls forth, the soul of youth to pledge for once and once only all the richest gifts of being to the service of her for whom they were given—the woman enthroned. I should see her again to-morrow—to-morrow—a wonderful hope with which to close the day.

CHAPTER XI

GWENN

IT was just about noon when I heard her voice over the telephone.

"I should like to see you very much this evening," she said, "but I'm a little embarrassed to know where. The parlor of the house with its guard of beady-eyed old ladies would be bad enough at best. Unfortunately it is being decorated now. Ugh! The place reeks with calimine and varnish!"

"I'm glad you called up," I answered, "especially since it isn't to plead another engagement. It has occurred to me that perhaps it would be well for me to meet you less ostentatiously, anyhow, for a few days. I'll explain why when I see you!"

"Hasn't he left town?" she asked with a quick note of alarm.

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"Oh, yes. That's all right. Don't worry. I'll call in a taxi-cab and we'll ride to a little restaurant out south where we can get a quiet table, listen to some poor music and talk things over. Will that be all right?"

"Yes," she said, doubtfully, "you're not afraid of being seen in public with me, are you? It's just at the boarding house, I presume!"

"That's unjust." I was much confused. "You know that isn't the reason. I wish to protect you, not myself."

"Come to think of it—wait a minute—someone just stepped into the room where this phone is. I didn't want anyone to hear this. I think my landlady, who is a most proper person, would be quite shocked at my going out in a taxi-cab with a dashing gentleman."

"Oh, come now!" I protested.

"I was speaking from the boarding-house standpoint!" she explained. "I don't wish to create a bad impression the first week. I'll slip out to the corner drug-store—'Bang's'—you know—at—say, eight o'clock. You drive

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up there—the side street entrance—and then I'll come out and pop into the car and no one will be any wiser. It will seem like quite an adventure!"

"Good for you!" I exclaimed. "I'll be there at eight o'clock sharp."

I passed a very tiresome afternoon. I anticipated a very poor dinner at the Club. Of course, Dora was peevish when I telephoned that I was forced to stay down for dinner.

"Does the mysterious lady demand dinner?" she said, nastily suspecting my intentions.

"I'm going to dine at the Club," I replied curtly. "Call me up there if you don't believe me."

"Expect to meet her afterwards, evidently," she surmised. "Why not be a sport, Gilbert, and take her to dinner. Still, I suppose she can't eat with a veil on. I know she wears one. All adventuresses do. 'The tall, svelte woman, quietly gowned in cerise velvet and heavily veiled, swept mysteriously across the crowded dining room.'"

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The thought presented itself for the first time: Why hadn't I asked her to dinner? Stupid fool that I was! I had been so excited over the prospect of seeing her in the evening that I hadn't considered an earlier appointment.

"Good-bye," I said, abruptly, to sister.

Then I gazed vaguely at the telephone directory. If I only knew where she was employed! A large mail-order house, she had said. There were only a few. I could call them up in turn and simply ask for Miss Littlefield.

The first number drawn was a blank. "No such person here," said the operator decisively.

"What department?" was the response from the next house.

"I'm not sure," I said.

"I don't know of anyone here," began the telephone girl.

"Will you inquire? I'm quite positive." My tone was far from positive.

"Just a minute—Oh, yes, assistant to Mr.

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Jones;—line is busy; will you hold the wire?"

"Yes!" That blessed girl had deceived me by telling me the real name of her new boss. Perhaps the former one's name had been Smith!

"Here you are."

"Miss Littlefield?" I asked.

"Yes," said a startled voice.

"This is Mr. Winston. I beg a thousand pardons, for being so slow to think, but, won't you take dinner with me?"

"How did you find"—she began excitedly; then she shifted to a level tone of business. "Thank you, no. It's very thoughtful of you. I'm very busy now so please excuse me."

The click of disconnection filled me with dismay. Was she offended because I had searched out her workshop? Perhaps she would not appear at eight o'clock.

I dread a misunderstanding over the telephone. It's so hard to tell what the other person is thinking, even if you are sure that each

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of you is hearing the other aright. Then it's so easy to dismiss one in the midst of apologies. No opportunity to change a mistaken notion while being politely shown the door! Just, click! and you are left talking to an automaton central operator who demands to know, "number, please!" or cruelly suggests, "I'll ring them again!"

Dinner at the Club was worse than I had expected. My pet waiter was ill, so I had a stupid substitute, a water-boy temporarily raised to man's estate. The responsibility robbed him of the little intelligence he had previously owned. Everything arrived cold. Then Gibley roamed in and joined me uninvited. He never said: "May I play," even in bridge. The rest of the meal was characterized by soggi-ness; soggy food, soggy thoughts, soggy hope.

"There's talk of imposing a service charge in the main dining-room," observed Gibley. "Imposition it is, I say. What do we pay our dues for?"

Gibley was always interested in some such

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vital question as that; always argued by the assertion-and-question method.

"I suppose we pay for the general club facilities," I answered. I was hostile to the proposed service charge but when Gibley attacked anything I instinctively fell in with the defense.

"Isn't service in the dining-room one?" he demanded. "Most important one! Club's largely a place to eat."

"And drink," I added.

"And drink," he echoed cordially. "We'll have a service charge from the bar, yet." There was a tragic sound of horror in his voice.

"No, the bar pays. The restaurant loses. You pay a service charge on billiards or that would lose also."

"No, I don't." He paused for effect. "I don't play billiards," he roared appreciatively. This was a typical Gibley jest. He would repeat it for days to all who would listen. It seemed to me that I saw happy diners around us shudder in anticipation, as they heard his mirth.

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Gibley continued entertaining me in this vein for an hour, during dinner and in the lounging room. At quarter of eight I rose gladly. He accompanied me kindly to the cloak-room. As we were getting into our coats he made his first interesting remark:

“Saw a chap who said he knew you to-day. Seemed quite interested in you. Queer fish—name’s Curlew. I know some funny things about him; was going to tell you, but since you’re in such a hurry it’ll have to wait.”

I cursed him roundly to myself. The Gibleys of life always bore you by the hour and omit to speak of just the things that they might know would be sure to interest you. That is, of course, the reason why they are wearisome. Bores talk to interest themselves; not their listeners.

“I am in a hurry,” I said, mastering my annoyance. “But I’m interested in Curlew. Can’t I see you to-morrow? How about lunching together? Twelve-thirty? All right.”

During the short ride in the taxi-cab I contin-

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ued to curse Gibley. I didn't want to lunch with him. I hate to lunch with a man just to get information. Every meal is to me in a way a social function. If I can not have enjoyable companionship I wish to eat alone. A business friendship is just as good and square a proposition of common interest as a purely social one. But making a pretense of human interest where there is only business interest seems like a truckling hypocrisy. I can't stand for it and, being a bachelor, I don't.

It occurred to me most unpleasantly that until a woman came into my life I had stuck to this principle since its formulation in my first year of business. Was it typical of the future I hoped for, that thought for her, the wish to serve her, should break down my scruples? As the car stopped beside the appointed drug-store I chided myself. Every good woman must be an inspiration for right living. I had been bred up to that idea. It must be so—yet, yet—I peered out of the window, anxiously. Was she going to break the appointment? The

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store door opened. Gwenn ran across the sidewalk. I pushed open the car door and she slipped in. The machine jerked forward and the driver swung it around toward the boulevard, according to his instructions.

"My!" exclaimed the lady, "everything has become so mysterious and exciting in my life lately that I've been awfully bored since Saturday. If you had come to call in the regular, prissy way I'm sure I should have felt very dull. Don't apologize! You see, I don't! But here we are again, clandestine rendezvous, invisible companion in dark sinister car, bound for the unknown."

I laughed extravagantly in my relief. She had not been offended with me.

"Very prosaic excursion, really," I said, "meeting at a drug store, rattletrap taxi-cab, clanking its way to the Crystal Café."

"That's a new place, isn't it? I've seen something in the papers."

"It's a dull, harmless spot," I explained. "The proprietors have shrewdly built a foun-

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tain, the size of a hip-bath, in the centre of the main room. On the opening night they decoyed one of the young bloods to it and I've always suspected that a waiter pushed him in. They had a tableful of reporters near by drinking freely on the house so there was a large free advertisement in all the morning papers. The local clergy were stirred up to protest against the invasion of a residence neighborhood by what one called, 'this swimming pool of vice.' That's all press agent work. Fact is, the place is ultra-respectable and until after theatre hours utterly dead. That's why we are going there."

"How did you know where to call me up this afternoon?" she demanded, without introduction.

"I didn't know. I just phoned every mail-order house until I found you."

"I wish I had told you, wholesale dry-goods," she said viciously. "You could have put in the afternoon at that. You don't play fair. You promised not to investigate me."

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"I promised not to seek out your hidden past," I retorted. "You never barred the present to me. I hope you won't." The last sentence was unexpectedly fervent.

"Have you any bad news for me?" she said abruptly.

"Not exactly, but a little that's disquieting. Let's wait until we are comfortable. This rattling cab makes it difficult for me to talk about important matters, when I want to speak plainly and be surely understood." An hour or so later I remembered that remark when I was vainly struggling to say something most important and blessing the jangle that helped to cover my confusion.

When we were snugly placed in a half-concealed corner of the garish Crystal Café I suggested something in the way of food.

"I refused dinner," she said smiling. "I had an engagement to dine with the new 'missus.' "

"Can't I order something in the way of a dessert?" I suggested. "I have no faith in

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any boarding house delicacies. Or may I order some wine. Please don't think I'm making the suggestion of 'Johnny setting up a tub of fizz' but I must do something to satisfy the waiter. You don't need to drink it, you know."

"No," she said, "I have a real wish for something I can't eat at home, crackers and cheese and coffee; the cheese is always dry, the crackers cold and coffee unspeakable!"

The waiter received the order with the customary irritation of the café attendant denied the prospect of alcoholic generosity in the tip. He placed the wine card before me. I said, "thank you," and returned it. He gazed pityingly at the lady escorted by a "tight-wad." He walked away very slowly. I felt sure that we would not be greatly bothered with his attentions.

"Mr. Curlew dropped in on me a few minutes before his train left. He said he suspected that I might have deceived him. He said he was forced to leave town but that he had ar-

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ranged so that he should find out. I think that means that he is going to have you 'shadowed.' "

"By detectives?"

"That's all I can see that it means if it wasn't merely an idle threat."

"He doesn't make idle threats," she said with conviction.

I decided on the spot that I would say nothing regarding his advice to me to keep away. She might conceive it to be her duty to keep me away. Of course, I didn't care for the idea of provoking Curlew's wrath, but keeping away from her was quite inconceivable—preposterous—well, simply impossible. I might as well acknowledge it; I was in that pleasant lunacy where I was willing to take any part assigned to me except that of absent friend. I would gladly personify any useful object, from pocket-book to doormat, just so that I might be of service and that she might be pleased to have me near at hand.

"Then you can reasonably expect to be un-

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der surveillance. I wonder if we were followed to-night?"

She looked around the room apprehensively.

"There's no harm if we are," I suggested. "If we only had a table loaded with glasses it might help prove the deception."

She laughed.

"The better I behave, the worse for me," she said. "The more wicked I appear, the safer I'll be—oh—oh," she stopped and flushed deeply.

The same thought had occurred to me. She avoided my eye for a few moments. Then she pressed her lips together with a most attractive air of conquered diffidence and looked up bravely.

"You thought of the same thing," she accused.

"Yes, I did," I admitted, "it seemed so obvious a solution. There are a lot of the quite improper places where perfectly respectable people go to satisfy a quite unrespectable

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curiosity. We could be seen a great deal in such places.”

“From there to the really bad places wouldn’t be much of a step, would it?”

“Not for a man. Quite impossible for you.” I was firm on that point.

“I suppose the improper places would seem bad enough to me and appear utterly disgraceful in a detective’s report. I’ve never been to any such. I should think it might be interesting.”

“Some people find it so,” I sneered. “Morbid interest, I think, in human weakness. Without the blur of alcohol it usually seems pretty nasty, sordid stuff to pry into.”

“It shows up one side of life, doesn’t it?” she argued. “How can you appreciate life if you don’t know all sides?”

“I suppose you can’t,” I said. “But just walk down the street, look at the house fronts and then enter a few living rooms—that will give you a pretty fair knowledge of the charac-

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ter of people in the block. I don't think it's necessary to go poking into the cans that are put out in the alley. People give themselves away enough at the front door. Social students don't need to prowl in back passages."

"You aren't very enthusiastic over the idea," she said. "Perhaps it was a foolish thought."

"In the present situation," I protested, "I think it is a great idea. If you will accept my company we'll make expeditions to all the tough places in town that are not unsafe or utterly impossible. If we can only be sure that Curlew's detectives are on the trail! Of course, the only way to be sure of that would be to notify the agency and take the 'shadow,' with us. Otherwise we may lose him just when we are about to appear most wicked."

"You haven't a high opinion of detectives," she remarked. "I've always thought that they did very wonderful things."

"My experience is that they do very stupid things. By the way, was there a motor-cyclist in the drug store before you met me?"

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"I believe there was," she stared questioningly. "Why do you ask?"

"Look at the table over by the door, just beyond the pillar. Is that the same man?"

"It certainly is. I remember his funny little nose. Has he followed us?"

"Evidently and in a typically stupid, obvious way. He was outside the Club; heard me give directions and scooted to the store ahead of me. Hadn't I better order some highballs and start the gay life?"

"I hate whiskey."

"Would you care to drink anything else? No? Then I'll order the highballs. Give you more the appearance of an old stager. He'll note it down for his report, 'two highballs,' and probably try to find out from the waiter whether they were Scotch, Bourbon or Rye. You can pour yours out bit by bit into that palm beside you. Don't let him see you do it."

"Isn't it exciting?" she whispered.

"Oh, very," I said dryly. "We'll have to

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find some intoxicant for you to drink if we are to start the pursuit of sin."

"I could drink a little beer," she suggested so timorously that I laughed aloud.

"You have had a fine preparation for this job, I can see. Well, beer is standard in most of the bum joints. Very poor beer at a large price."

"You seem to know something about them," she said quizzically.

"Not a great deal," I said hastily. "And what knowledge I have I'm not proud of. Eighteen to twenty-five is the age for boasting of folly. I'm a little older than that."

"One thing I must have an understanding about," she spoke hesitatingly, "if we decide to go on any of these excursions they must be 'dutch treat.' I couldn't think of accepting your aid solely for my comfort and having you pay for the privilege of helping."

"Now that's because I spoke of the large price of beer!" I remonstrated. "Such jaunts won't be, in any real sense, expensive. I'll

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not order champagne. They will be just like any other evenings. I ask you to accompany me on inspection tours of the forcing-houses for the red-light district, so that you may observe the floriculture of mistakes."

The metaphor pleased me and I became oracular: "You will find the places warm, well-lighted and heavily perfumed, very much the same atmosphere as that of a theatre; possibly the ventilation will be better. You will see farce, comedy and tragedy all acted by mummers who play at life because they lack the strong souls with which to play with life. You will hear the tinkle of thin music, the folk-songs of sowers who dread to reap, who ever sing of the sowing and never of the harvest. You will hear paid laughter like the hard ring of silver and the snarl of cheap jests that cost someone dear. You will see soft steel and tender claws, repulsive charm and greedy generosity.

"It will be merely slipping from one theatre to another, seeing one act here, another there,

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nothing real—to you. You mustn't spoil it by thinking it's real. Take it as a show. I invite you to go with me. It will interest you and I shall be interested in your interest."

"You make it hard for me—but really—" she was much distressed.

"Very well," I announced, "I'll keep a pocket memorandum and render you an account of your expense every week."

"Thank you." This silly thing really had worried her.

The highballs which we were to cast upon the bow of our ship of false adventure now arrived. It was time to launch the craft.

We raised our glasses. Under the shield of her large hat she turned and emptied part of hers into the convenient palm. I had put mine to my lips when something in her profile arrested me momentarily. A crazy thought flickered before me. It resolved itself into a sudden purpose. The very absurdity of it attracted me, the hazardous folly—no, not folly—the splendid risk—that was it! I put down

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the glass untasted. I did not want alcohol on my breath or in my thoughts at such a time.

"Exchange glasses," I said, "and throw away part of mine."

We slipped them across the table and touched them together again. I lifted hers to my mouth. By George! she poured fully half of mine into the palm!

"W.C.T.U.?" I inquired.

"No," she said, "Nor Y.W.C.A. But I hate whiskey. I just do."

"You don't like me to drink it?" I bantered.

"It isn't that," she explained. "But we've made a little compact to go sightseeing for a queer purpose. I expect to enjoy myself doing it. It's seeing life, in a way. But somehow after what you've just been saying I have an extra hate for that coarse, brutal drink with its bad odor that sort of represents all the worst of that kind of pleasure."

"A big effect for a small payment—at the time."

"Something like that. Wine has a romance

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to it, taste, gentle perfume, soft color, pretty glasses, all the neat customs that go with it. Its part in life at the worst has not been all bad; there's been so much beauty and hope in it. But whiskey—an ugly black bottle, a little, bad smelling drink poured out of it and swallowed rapidly so that there will be only one raw taste of concentrated meanness. That's what I call it. I had an uncle who 'took it straight.' It was the only thing in life he did take straight. I hate it."

"Let's leave this place," I suggested. "I have a real idea. I'll explain it in the cab."

We prepared to go with sufficient deliberation to warn the motor-cyclist. We didn't wish to inconvenience him! He should have plenty of time to prepare for the trail again.

"Drive out to that north-side German garden—beyond Lincoln Park—" I said to the chauffeur— "Yes, that's it— Don't burn off your tires getting there. I don't care to be arrested."

"Never was but once," he replied cheerfully.

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We jolted over some car tracks and then ran onto the smooth boulevard.

The time had come—for just what I didn't know—except that I must say something, which was hard to say. We ought not continue any longer on this embarrassing basis of a sudden acquaintance, too intimate to be casual, yet too uncertain of intent to be comfortable. I wanted to tell her why I wished to be with her, to serve her where I might. How much I dared to tell, how far I dared to leap, I did not know, but some word must be spoken to brush aside the mist which hung between us. Old acquaintances need no words to define their feelings. A thousand little intimacies give them understanding. But we had known each other a very short time; yet, under such trying circumstances that we had been forced into sudden confidences. In one moment we talked as old, dear friends and in the next we sat silent and confused.

Yet I did not really know her; at least that was what my sisters would say. In fact I *did*

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know her. I felt a trust in her that meant far more to me than knowledge of the location of her home town, the type of school she had attended, the names of her parents, the date of her birth and all the other set forms of information that stand for so much in the domains of propriety and mean so little. I didn't care whether she had been married or not. But—the final “but”—perhaps she *was* married?—To blurt out a formal proposal under the circumstances seemed silly—yet I knew that I loved her, and, married or single, whoever she was, wherever she had come from, she was here with me—and perhaps she needed me. She couldn't speak. I must. It was the time for the splendid risk!

I was acutely conscious of the absurd fact that my tongue felt like a piece of blotting paper. Of course, just when I desired to muster all the sincerity and depth of feeling I possessed and put it into simple strong words, my tongue became incapable of liquid utterance! Then power to concentrate thought and

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mill it in speech suddenly left me. What on earth was I going to say? How was I going to say it?

“Miss Fenton,” I whispered hoarsely. Then I set my jaw muscles and tried to speak normally. “We’ve seen a great deal of each other in a few days. We’ve been what might be called very intimate on short acquaintance. You may feel at times, on account of that and because I know so little of you except that you are you, that I may—may—well—not distrust you—but at least not give you whole-hearted confidence. Feeling that way you may not have full faith in me.”

“I have,” she said quickly and firmly.

I caught the gleam of her eyes in the dark corner of the cab. Then a passing car cast the full glare of the lamps on her face for a moment. There was a look in it, that I might almost call serene content, that quite unnerved me. I felt as though for the moment she had been content with me, as though for one moment, miserable, mistake-making, half-civilized

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person that I was, I appeared without flaw to her, to her, the truly flawless one. Of course, I didn't accept myself as such a poor thing, or her content as perfect—except for just the moment—one moment of blind adoration responding to blind faith.

"I've been sorely tempted to tell you many things," she said haltingly. "You've so generously taken all for granted. Yet, as I said before, they are things which are not mine to tell. Anything which was my secret alone you might have."

"There's just one I want," I interrupted. I didn't know what I was going to say. I didn't care to know. I wanted to plunge on the great risk. "I don't wish to hear the other secrets. It gives me a bigger joy to take them all for good, because you say so and you are you. Don't stop me! This one thing is all I wish to know. It's your secret, yours alone. Could you ever care for me as I care for you?" I stumbled on madly, dreading an answer. "I can't express how I care for you, any more

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than I could tell you how the first spring day uplifts me. I only know it does. I can't tell you how the great spring seemed to come into my life the first day I saw you. I suppose you'll think I'm silly if I tell you that it's June in my heart now—after knowing you a few short days. All life seems to have budded in a few hours. I can't tell you how I care for you. I can only say that life with you is new life, a life I've never known before, and, like every child in life, I want it to be always springtime. I want you with me always."

The rattling cab jolted over the rutted streets. I became suddenly silent. She made not a sound. I hadn't expected it would be like this. I had not even touched her. I couldn't even see her, but I hadn't tried. I had simply stared gloomily ahead at the oncoming lights on the street, at the broad shoulders of the stolid driver. I had felt in one terrible moment the full sense of risk—the risk of the great prize of life upon one throw. It was no time for choosing words, there was no

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need to goad my resolve with the thrill of touching her. Every nerve and sense was taut with the struggle to cast all my hopes, all my longing, in one final throw. It must be win or lose. No compromise gamble this! One mighty stake!

There was a sound as of a sob from the dark corner. I put out a hand and her hand closed over mine convulsively.

"It's so hard, so hard, but it's so absurd—if—if—of course—you must mean it. If you do, I have the right. I have the right. I must say this. I'm free, free as a child. I have always been free, I have the right to be—to be cared for—if you—if you—"

"I want you, oh, Gwenn, I want you."

"I'm glad, I'm glad," she said softly. "I love you."

Her arms, clinging, clinging closer, yet held me away. My groping hand touched her cheek, a strand of hair tingled across my wrist as she turned her head and the tear-wet eyes came near to mine. Then her lips, sweet beyond all

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understanding, met my eager mouth. We had taken the splendid risk together—but the great prize nestled close and warm within my arms.

Gwenn! My Gwenn!

CHAPTER XII

THE DANCE HALL

SUDDENLY the car stopped. We had reached the German garden.

"Confound it!" I said. "There's no reason for stopping here. I simply named this place to insure a long ride. Shall we go in for a few moments?"

"Yes," she said dubiously. "I suppose my hair looks dreadful. Men never think about such things."

"Men!" I repeated jealously.

"Such things," I said, she answered pertly, "there are other situations that result in the same mussed-up effect! Oh, I don't mind."

Nevertheless I know that both of us felt horribly self-conscious as we walked into the brightly lighted restaurant and followed the

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head waiter to a table which he insisted on selecting in the center of the room. I was too embarrassed to suggest a change.

We sat there and talked probably for an hour, talked of everything and nothing. I can't remember a word of what was said but I know that I was beatifically pleased with all I said and heard.

Then she said:

"Really, I must be going home."

I remember that!

"We ought not to let an evening slip by," I protested, "without discouraging Mr. Curlew. That reminds me. I had clean forgot. Is our motor-cyclist here?"

"Yes," she said, "he's at a table near the entrance. I noticed him a while ago."

"Then we mustn't disappoint him. We should visit at least one place of questionable character to-night. This garden is so proper that it's like taking you to a concert; it looks as if you were suspiciously respectable."

"It's getting late," she demurred. "I have

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a key, but if the landlady hears me come in after midnight she'll be more upset than we hope to make Mr. Curlew. She is a kind soul who wants her house to be irreproachable and really takes a friendly interest in lone girls."

"You dance, of course?" I inquired.

"Yes." She looked doubtful.

"Then we will go to Winkler's—the dance hall, you know." I enjoyed the appearance of masterful decisiveness. I had been, and was, so submissive in spirit. "We can dance a little and watch the crowd."

"Isn't that pretty—? I've read in the papers—"

"Oh, it's an obvious example of law breaking in selling liquor all night, so the papers drag it out whenever they wish to attack the city administration. But so many 'slumming' parties go there that it is quite decent in externals. Its reason for existence, however, is bad enough; so that our sleuth will make a big, black mark on his report."

In the end I overcame her hesitation to make

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the first dive into the underworld. Manlike I didn't realize the extra repulsion she would have in the sight of stale, paid passion on a night consecrated to the new-found bounty of love. But even I felt the shock of the contrast the moment I entered the dance hall.

On the way to Winkler's my thoughts naturally turned again to Curlew's place in her life and I clumsily hinted that perhaps in our present understanding she would feel able to explain his pursuit.

"Not to-night, please," she pleaded. "Will you take me on faith a little longer? The secret isn't mine but perhaps I can get permission to share it with—with you. This much I must say again; I'll say it plainly. Mr. Curlew has never had any right to a part of my life, and he has none now, neither legally nor morally. I have no present or past ties binding me to him. I'm sorry for him; I'm sorry for others he might harm; I've tried to prevent some things from happening, at some cost to myself; but the effort is well worth while."

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"I can't fathom it," I said. "I suppose it would be easier not to try. I supposed at first that he must be a discarded husband or lover—"

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I never thought—How could you tell me that you— if you imagined—especially the first!"

"You told me to trust," I said cheerfully, "and I did! So when you put your arms around me—this way, and when I knew your lips—this way, then—well, it simply couldn't be."

"No, no," her voice was deep and full, "it couldn't be. No one else has ever held me—so—before!"

The harsh lights in front of Winkler's appeared as the car turned a corner.

"Do they wear evening clothes here?" she asked. "It just occurred to me. Of course, a man wouldn't think of it till he was inside the place."

"They wear everything," I answered. "The department store victim is in the clothes in

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which she stands all day. The flat-dweller may come in anything from short skirt to low neck, or both together! You needn't worry about clothes. You're fully attired except that your face is naked; most of those here wear two or three coats from chin to forehead. But then they need them, poor souls; you don't."

"I have a blush with me," she suggested.

"I doubt if you will use it after the first few minutes. There's much less to blush about here than in the average theatre."

I bought tickets, submitted to the customary cloak-room hold-up and then piloted Gwenn around the slippery floor, which was sparsely covered with dancers. We found a table against the wall a little removed from the dancing space and I congratulated myself on the happy chance of not meeting any acquaintance on the way. I had conducted Edith and George to this place one time, in satisfaction of one of Edith's whims, and at the very door, had run straight into a large party of business friends in a fairly sad state. The encounter

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was quite embarrassing. They saw that I was with decent people and audibly voiced their disapproval.

"I waited a moment for the dance to start," I said, "so as to make our entrance as inconspicuous as possible."

"That was nice," she answered. "I didn't enjoy stepping into the open hall. I hadn't realized it would be one big room and everybody sitting around the edges staring at you."

"You see, the purpose of the place is inspection and appraisal," I explained. "So, strong lights and a clear view are essential to the comfort of patrons."

The dance ended and a sallow, unlovely man arose and sang, "Love Me and the World is Mine." He evidently realized that no one could ever do this, not even the sick girl over in Dearborn Street who paid him a weekly per cent. of her earnings, so he put no heart in his plea. Possibly he had grown weary of the song after its thousandth repetition. But he was mindful of the collection to follow, so he beat

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his flagging energies into a semblance of enthusiasm and exhibited in the crescendo climax the power to produce a volume of brutal noise that had probably allured him into a musical career.

The applause was generous, considering that it was almost wholly perfunctory. The songster descended from the orchestra platform, bearing a plate for contributions, and the habitués urged their male companions to be liberal. That is, some did. Those who didn't believe the artist divided fairly with them quietly deprecated the extravagance and suggested more drinks. They were sure of their per cent. on drinks. They received little checks to guarantee a fair accounting.

"Would you care to dance?" I asked as the orchestra started desultorily on a popular waltz.

"It seems so public," she objected, "not like private pleasure, sort of an exhibition of oneself."

"I suppose it is; still no one will really give

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any attention to us. People come here to have attentions forced on them."

"I think I will," she decided. "I'm crazy to dance with you. I'm sure you dance well."

"Well, of course," I began in mock boastfulness, "at my senior prom. it was said—"

"I know what they say at college proms.," she retorted. "I'll tell you the truth."

To me the dance was perfect. We glided away so smoothly that I forgot the leering tables around the floor, forgot the rouged faces we passed, forgot the stuffy, overperfumed atmosphere and the mechanical playing of the tired orchestra. I simply was dancing for the first time with her. All the good dances of years past had become one, all transient fancies and flitting passions had become one, all the slender, lithe forms of forgotten partners were one in the dear girl inside my arm! It seemed that there never had been but one woman in the world for me. Others had been granted some tiny portion of her charm and so had

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pleased me for an hour. But she alone possessed all.

"You do dance well," she said warmly, adding maliciously, "but you're a bit out of practice. Own up! You haven't been on the floor for a year!"

"And I thought I was doing so well," I complained. "But then you are a perfect partner."

"No, I'm not," she laughed. "I gave you a year because I haven't danced for nearly three, and I knew you'd notice it."

"I didn't notice anything except that it was our first dance and it couldn't have been better."

She smiled richly.

"I didn't mean it," she whispered. "I love to tease, but I can't keep it up this time. It was a heavenly dance, think of it! heavenly! here!"

"Great Scott," I exclaimed. "There's Gibley. He's heading this way. Take no notice

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of him. He's probably half-gone now. I won't introduce him on any consideration."

Sure enough Gibley rolled up to the table.

"Well, well, well, old scout, Winston," he proclaimed with detestable cordiality. "In a great hurry to get away to-night! I remember!" He looked significantly at Gwenn, who gazed steadily beyond him.

I shook hands flabbily. Of course, in this place and semi-intoxicated he would be duller than usual. No hint would drive him away. I stood up.

"I'm sorry, old man," I said, winking prodigiously. "I'm very busy, very much engaged just at present. You understand!" More winks and shrugging of shoulders.

"Trust me, trust me," he boomed out, "I'm no butter-in. I'm on, old scout! Just dropped by to say howdy-do. Thought you might want to—no—of course not—no poaching on another fellow's preserves—not me, old scout—Happy days. Happy days."

He wobbled away.

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“Strange thing,” I said to Gwenn, more to make conversation than anything else, “that man knows Mr. Curlew.”

“Probably better than Mr. Curlew knows him,” she remarked. “Mr. Curlew has his bad points but he’s not that sort of a man.”

“Oh, Gibley’s a bore,” I replied, a bit jealously, “but there’s nothing very bad about him—accepting his standards as those of his breed.”

“There’s nothing very bad about him,” she repeated, “except that he has the type of mind that would never consider that you might be here with a decent purpose or that your companion might possibly be a decent woman, though goodness knows I can’t appear very abandoned!”

“I’m not so sure,” I said teasingly. “The excitement has given you an unusual amount of color—really looks artificial—though, strange to say, attractive, and you are to my mind naturally a most alluring person.”

“Yes, yes,” she was actually embarrassed,

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"I look just like that woman in black over there, I suppose, demure and dangerous. Now, what do you suppose that woman's life is?"

"Well, really!" I protested.

"Don't be funny," she said firmly, "when I am serious. I was wondering what her own intimate life was—outside of—well, I'll say, business."

"It would be my guess, that she hadn't any intimate life, in the sense of which you speak, or life of her own. You see, she can't get rid of her business."

"I don't see just what you mean."

"I mean that she is always what she is. She can't get away from it. She can only live in a place where everyone knows what she is and anyone who came to see her would know the same. The very sales-girls where she goes shopping know her. She couldn't deceive them."

"But," protested Gwenn, "suppose she goes away, out of town, or even in town, suppose she goes to theatres and such places. How does

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she feel and think when she gets alone with herself?"

"Again I say, she doesn't. She gives herself away wherever she goes. I don't believe she is ever able to have any life outside of the one life that you see represented here. When she's absolutely alone—and most of this class of people can't bear to be alone—but when she is alone, I'll guarantee the last thing she is willing to think about is herself."

"Sounds very moral," said Gwenn with a grimace.

"I don't mean it that way. I mean that this life excludes all others. The only moral in my statement is that if a woman goes into this life she dies—not in the sense that her morality dies, but she is made an outcast of life and as far as all real participation in life goes she might as well be dead."

"But many women lead this sort of life secretly." Gwenn was very much interested in the little problem she had raised. She kept her eyes fixed on the woman in black.

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“Don’t think I regard myself as the source of all wisdom on this subject,” I said, “but I can answer that last suggestion also. The wise and successful professional ladies live so-called double lives so as to keep in the world. But they must be very careful. You won’t see them here. They can’t use these crude, blunt processes; and I may also say that their ways are not half so decent as most of those in use here. I prefer these brazen methods of earning a living to the treachery that flourishes on the boulevards.”

“You’re a man,” remarked Gwenn, rather obviously. “You haven’t the faintest idea what’s going on in that woman’s mind. There, see, the men have left her table. Now, I knew they would from her attitude.”

I laughed.

“And I knew they would because I knew who one of the men was. He probably always takes a drink with that girl when he is passing by this place. She’s quite a character. I brought an out-of-town man up here once. I was try-

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ing to land a big bond. He wasn't vicious but he wanted to 'see the town.' I showed him a few worm holes in the city's skin like this place. We didn't follow them into the rotten core. That sort of thing did not appeal to either of us."

"You always seem to have been very circumspect," she said, perhaps a little incredulously. I decided to let the suggestion pass. Heaven knows the average man has enough to explain to his wife to spread thinly over a few years of confessional! But—think of his embarrassment if he sat with his lady-love on the very night of his avowal, in Winkler's dance hall, a place that would inevitably excite her liveliest interest and suspicion as to his misguided past! It was an occasion for thrice blessing all that was clean and decent within one, and cursing all that was smirched with a treble curse.

"My friend became quite interested in this woman. Her name is—Babette, I believe. Would you like to talk with her?"

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"Oh, I couldn't! That is, I mean she wouldn't want to."

"I think she would come," I said. "It's a matter of business you know—so much per cent. on a round of drinks. She may not care to talk—to a woman. But if she did she wouldn't be rude. I've seen these girls teach sight-seeing ladies valuable lessons in politeness. Only, unfortunately, the pupils were very dull."

"Would she really come?" asked Gwenn.

"Probably, with her yellow-haired friend. Oh, George! James!—yes—you!" The waiter leaped to the call. "Will you ask Babette and her friend if they will join us?"

He argued with them a moment and came back shaking his head.

"They are waiting for somebody," he explained.

"Yes, I know they are," I replied grimly. "Tell Babette that I am the man who came out with 'Big Polly.' Perhaps she's forgotten me."

"Why don't you go over and ask her yourself," inquired Gwenn.

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"Not good form," I said. "There's just as much etiquette here as in social circles where virtue is more expensive."

The girl in spangled black and her blond companion arose and sauntered over to our table.

"Howdy-do," said Babette, nodding at both of us. No further introductions were required. "I didn't notice at first that you were the man who came out with Mr. Pollard."

The waiter "took the orders," our visitors choosing a strangely named drink that was probably only colored water.

"I had a letter from 'Big Polly,' a while ago," I remarked. "He spoke of you."

"He was a nice man." She spoke feelingly. She had liked him and he had liked her just as any man might be attracted by a woman met in more conventional surroundings. Only in this case it had been simply a matter of passing a couple of hours buying drinks that we didn't either want or use, in order to add enough to her per cent. account to pay for her

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time. As I recollected they had talked horses and dogs exclusively.

"Remember Custer, his saddle horse?" I asked.

"A big gray mare, wasn't it?" her eyes showed real interest.

"Yes, she slipped in the park and broke a leg recently."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." She looked it. "I had my horse fall under me once in Central Park. But he just skinned his knees."

"How long is it since you left New York?" I asked.

"Three years."

"Did you like New York?" inquired Gwenn, evidently glad of a chance to say something.

"Oh, yes," said the girl, promptly encrusting her tone and manner. "It's the only place."

"I suppose it's much livelier than Chicago," said Gwenn, resolved to be cordial, even at the risk of rebuff.

"Livelier," repeated Babette with infinite scorn. "Nobody spends any money here for

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the fun of it. People go away when they want to have a good time."

"That's true," chimed in the blond friend. "All the good spenders go to New York when they want to make a noise. A good time here is like getting 'lit' in a church bazaar."

Babette lifted her neatly penciled brows at her companion, evidently feeling that she was not acting up to "class."

"I think you're quite right," said Gwenn tactfully. "I haven't gone around very much in Chicago but it always seemed to me that there was no real gayety in the hotels or restaurants, no spirit of play."

"No," said Babette suppressing a tiny yawn, "it's a pretty dull place"—then she addressed me directly: "I'm afraid we must be going. Remember me to Mr. Pollard if you see him."

"I will," I said, "I know he remembers you."

"Glad to have met you," she said, vaguely to the table-at-large, and, with her blond chat-tel meekly following, she strolled away to a distant table.

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"She interested me immensely," said Gwenn. "Did you see how she looked at the other girl? Just sort of put her in her place. Do you suppose they are friends?"

"Not exactly," I said. "I think Babette is a 'madam' in a small way. Has an apartment and three or four girls on her staff. This girl is simply an employ  , you see."

"Ugh!" she answered. "Let's be going. I think we've been bad enough for one night. We've certainly seen enough unpleasant things. Oh, of course, it's quite entertaining. Theatrically speaking, it's a good show—but—by the way, I nearly forgot, have you seen our motor-cyclist?"

"No, I haven't," I admitted. "I trust we have not escaped him. A detached man came in shortly after us and has been sitting at that little table near the cloak-room. He's been chatting with different girls, but I have imagined that he had an eye on us. Maybe they have changed 'shadows.' I'm sure the motor-cyclist followed us here."

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After putting Gwenn in the taxi-cab I made a pretense of going back to borrow a match from the ticket-taker and so met the new "shadow" in the hall. He passed by me, but stood outside until I closed the door of our car. Then he slipped into another car across the street. I had told our driver simply to drive over to Michigan Avenue and then south slowly. The other car kept a little way behind us. I was sure no car would go so slowly except to trail us.

"We are being followed," I announced to Gwenn. "I don't like to give away your address."

"Oh, no," she protested. "He mustn't know that."

"Let me figure it out," I said, and after some hard thinking, I evolved my plan.

Stopping the car at the first drug store which we sighted, I telephoned the Club for another taxi to wait for me at the side entrance to a big down-town hotel. I made very sure that a car was ready and ordered it sent over immediately.

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Then I went back to my cab, signed the card and gave our faithful driver his reward of merit. I instructed him most carefully to drive to the main entrance of the hotel selected and wait for at least five minutes after we had entered. Then he could go on his way rejoicing. I counted that the pursuer would not hurry his steps when he saw our cab evidently waiting for our return.

I judge that in fact he took his time, as I had calculated, because in due course we scurried through the hotel, out the side door and into cab number two, without apparently being observed.

I gave the new driver an address a block or more away from Gwenn's house and settled back to enjoy a peaceful ride. Suddenly a thought struck me and I laughed aloud.

"He'll watch that hotel a long time," I said. "There'll be a big black mark in his report."

Then I felt suddenly ashamed.

"I beg pardon," I continued, putting out an apologetic arm. "I didn't intend that result.

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Perhaps we had better go back and give him the trail again."

"Don't!" she said shrinking away from the embrace. "Please don't!"

"Just as you say," I answered a little crossly. "You'll at least admit that we undertook to make him believe anything; the worse the better. I don't see why even too much success should make you feel differently toward me."

"It isn't that," she explained, "it isn't what he'll think. But seeing all those things to-night—makes me feel—well, they were new to me but they seemed old stories to you. Then you were so quick to think of the worst impression of this last thing. It seems that a man's life and a woman's life are very different. It makes you seem like a stranger. I don't know what you really think, what you've been, what you are."

"Do you realize that I know even less about you? It's all a matter of trust, Gwenn; you can't say, 'I love,' except on faith. It takes

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years to tell what we love, whether it's what the other is or what the other seemed to be. You don't know, I don't know, but if we feel we love, we must have faith and go forward. It's the great, wonderful, brave, demanding risk of life—to say, 'I love.' But when we say it, we've cast our lots together; we must be good, faithful comrades and be true to our trust. You're not going to begin to doubt me now, are you?"

Two warm arms around my neck and a soft, cool cheek against mine were all the answer that I had or wished.

The thought came to me of the sallow man who sang, "Love Me and the World is Mine!" and then passed around the contribution plate! There was no sneer in my mind. I felt terribly sorry for him; and still more sorry for the sick girl who shared with him her earnings.

The lone pursuit of Pleasure's mockeries—the fading life—for some! The comrade quest for happiness—a widening world—for those who have faith and risk their all.

CHAPTER XIII

A DINNER OF REBUKE

FOLLOWING the initial evening at Winkler's, Gwenn and I made many scandalous expeditions to various "worm holes" of the town, as she called them, adopting my rather inept designation. Naturally we had a few embarrassing experiences. A malicious fate decreed that we should meet Gibley oftener than any other of my acquaintances. I had lunched with him the day after our first meeting and nothing but my interest in Curlew had held me at the table. He was insufferably intimate regarding Winkler's; told me scores of his silly adventures there; joked me most offensively about my sudden drop in morals; took all the keen joy that a rounder gets out of the apparent weakening of a self-respect which he has always assumed must be an hypocrisy.

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In the end Gibley threw little light on Curlew's life. He knew nothing of his past except that he had been recently mixed up in Central American affairs. I gathered that his relationship with Gibley had arisen from a deal relating to some revolutionary scheme affecting one of the small republics down that way. Gibley's house dealt in firearms and other necessities of war and the secrecy incident to some of their operations was intensified by Gibley's fondness for posing as a man of mystery, a conceit apparently characteristic of exceptionally dull and timorous persons. To hear him talk, a stranger would have expected to see Secret Service men and international spies watching Curlew's every move. I should have discounted the entire melodramatic element of his story had not Curlew appealed to me so strongly as just the kind of man to get mixed up in a Central American teapot tempest.

Gibley said that Curlew had gone down there as an engineer for a government road. That he would thereby become involved in govern-

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ment politics was obvious, and, since numerous undertakings of that sort are financed from the United States the chances were strong that he was actively engaged in trying to put into power the government faction which offered the best inducements to his capitalists. If his backers happened to be opposed by the ruling financiers who pulled the strings at Washington, he was probably actively hostile to our State Department and necessarily working in secret.

So much grain I separated from the unpalatable chaff with which Gibley filled the lunch hour. But I resolved that the reward had been too small for the patient effort of enduring Gibley. So I shunned him thereafter so far as I could at the Club—only to meet his knowing grin somewhere in the course of almost every “worm hole” expedition!

Others beside Gibley met me, however, and the Paul Reveres of propriety promptly spread the news through every “Middlesex village and farm.” The result was that the smoldering

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“family interest” broke into a fierce flame. As Dora put it:—

“We could stand it if it were merely a late sowing of wild oats” (a conventional and hence quite respectable custom). “It’s this infatuation for a woman who apparently has no sense of decency, that alarms Edith and me.”

“Edith!” I snorted. “How about Edith’s sense of decency? People in whited sepulchres shouldn’t start throwing mud.”

“What a perfectly ridiculous statement,” said Dora. “Of course I don’t approve of Edith but, at least, her affair is quite respectable.”

“Oh, yes,” I responded. “If dear Edith decides to leave her husband and marry another woman’s, I suppose the whole thing will be arranged with all the conventional rites of absolution: a double divorce through appropriate perjury, the correct interval of broken-hearted retirement and then cracked wedding bells to peal out the new soul union.”

“Precisely,” said Dora.

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“All I can say,” I concluded heatedly, “is that, though I refuse to give any further confidence to an unappreciative family, my present affair is so pure and wholesome compared with Edith’s silly neurotics that I consider comparison an insult, and rebuke a very funny joke.”

So they decided to have a dinner and bring me to my senses. They followed the world-old misapprehension that the well-fed man is a reasonable being and decided to admonish me diplomatically. Of course, this wasn’t explained to me but when I heard that Edith and George were coming to dinner I knew what was up. Dora detests dinners “just for the family,” so that I recognized this arrangement as a noble sacrifice in the great cause of my regeneration. Then the night before the event Dora casually stated:—

“Dr. Grace has telephoned that he can come to-morrow. I’m so glad; that makes an even six. Anyhow, he’s a nice, friendly soul.”

“You little hypocrite!” I shouted. “Or-

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dinarily you can't stand Dr. Grace. What was that last thing you said about him: 'An unctuous old bore!' That was it. Now you want him to come in to help reduce me to silence with a wave of his white whiskers. All right, old lady, bring on your brigade of shallow moralists. I won't retreat. I know your guns are loaded with blanks. Poor old Dr. Grace! It's a shame to pull him into the fight. He never could aim straight and now he's almost lost his eyesight!"

"How you talk!" exclaimed Dora. "He only wears glasses for reading. He has wonderful sight for a man nearly seventy."

"Tush! tush!" I answered. "I was referring to his moral eyesight. His ethical guides are a few shop-worn phrases of which he doesn't know the meaning. As they don't apply to modern conditions he's practically morally blind. Lead him in for slaughter! He's your victim, not mine!"

In due course the family gathered solemnly around the dining table. I had had a hard day

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of business and temporarily lost my sense of humor, so that George wore proudly the only smile in the company. Dora and Edith bore looks of patient suffering and grimaced pathetically whenever I spoke. I gathered that the idea was to let me know that they would love me despite everything, but that love was at times a painful duty. Dr. Grace typified benignant intolerance itself. I felt that so Jove might have sat, reproving his lovelorn sons and majestically overlooking his own many indiscretions.

Conversations were languid for a long time. Then I met George's twinkling eyes and amusement dissipated my resentment. I resolved to have a good time. Dora had led off a veiled attack on the loose morals of our time and was being fitly supported by profundities from Dr. Grace on the "old ways being the best."

"Yes," I broke in blithely, "I remember when you used to drive up to father's house in a covered phaeton and tell us youngsters about the wisdom of plain living and high thinking.

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You always said comfort had a most corrupting influence. I suppose the modern motor-car is responsible for many evils."

Dr. Grace had two cars. My counter-attack could hardly be called subtle!

"Ah! different times, different manners," he replied grandly, fixing a stern eye upon me. "Manners change, not morals!"

"But don't you think," I insisted, "that the automobile has lowered the ethical standards of the medical profession, for example, has increased the scramble for business? In your time even a good horse had his limits. You couldn't pay but a certain number of calls a day. Now you can handle at least three times the business."

"What we were speaking about," said the doctor, addressing himself to the friendly ladies, "was the looseness of morals particularly in sex matters. I think it has a close connection with the modern propaganda of women's rights—all rights and no obligations, I call it."

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"Of course, that explains it," I agreed insincerely. "As soon as you let a woman think, she's going to wonder why the men should have all the fun!"

"Gilbert!" rebuked two sisterly voices.

"If you mean," said the white whiskers, severely, "that as long as men are weak and sinful the tolerance which permits of their redemption should be extended to license equal depravity in the sex to which we turn for our higher ideals, I cannot but express deepest sorrow at your attitude."

The family murmured its approval.

"Is there any reason why a man shouldn't get a few ideals from himself and extend a little charity to his equally weak sister?" I demanded.

"I will give you a case in point," said the doctor, adopting his usual tactics of blandly discussing and answering only what he chose. "I have heard of a young man who has frequented places of most questionable character with a woman whom he has professed to love.

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Now, love is a sacred thing, a very sacred thing. It should uplift, not degrade—”

“Your idea,” I interrupted, unable to listen to his generalities, “is that such a man and woman couldn’t visit such places without degradation—no matter for what purpose?”

“My idea is,” he felt himself to be most impressive, because the table was very silent; “my idea is, that the woman thereby shows herself lacking in certain essential characteristics of womanliness which should warn the young man that his idol is clay. The man himself must feel that he is not living up to that which is the best within him, to take pleasure in such actions.”

“Since this is a very intimate gathering,” I suggested, “suppose we stop beating about the bush. You are speaking about me and about the woman whom, to speak plainly, I intend to marry. Do you all hear that!”

“I am sorry to hear it,” said Dr. Grace, with much self-pity. “You must pardon my plain-speaking, Gilbert, but I have known all

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of you since you were little children. I have an interest in you. I cannot remain silent when one of you seems to me to be on the verge of so great a mistake."

"What's the mistake?" I asked. "Is it wrong that I should love a woman who trusts herself to me? I'll tell you now, we don't go to these places for idle curiosity. We have a perfectly good reason."

"I'm afraid that what is a good reason in your sight, might not seem good to everyone." The doctor was gentle but firm.

"That's the trouble," put in George, piling rosined fuel on the fire, with a wicked joy. "You don't see what you are getting into, Gilbert. You're blinded by infatuation until you can't tell a good reason from a bad one. Better tell uncle all about it!"

"The final fact," announced our patriarch, "is that no good, honorable woman, nor any virtuous, clear-visioned man has any business in any such place. I cannot but believe, Gilbert, from all I have seen and heard that you

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are making a sad mistake. I hope you do not contemplate any immediate, public acknowledgment of your entanglement."

"By George," I cried, irritated beyond control. "If she would permit me I'd tell the whole world to-morrow. Now let me say a word to you: If you believe what you 'have seen and heard' about this scandal, regardless of my word, what right have you to talk to me? If I believed what I'd seen and heard about—well, say, the famous nurse at the General Hospital, what kind of counselor would you appear?"

"Oh, Gilbert," rose the family chorus. My reference was to one of several gossipy stories of the youth of the doctor that had survived many years of denial and always carried with them a strong air of probability.

"A personal attack is never argument—" began my mentor.

"In Heaven's name," I cried. "Am I to sit here silent while you slander the woman I love and not call your attention to the fact that

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your own past life should teach you to be chary of criticising others? You draw conclusions from suspicious circumstances with which I involve myself in the name of love. Yet you expect and have received in this house entire faith in the decency of your entanglement with a woman whom you never publicly professed to care for at all."

"I do not think that one unfortunate experience in the many years of my life disqualifies me from ever again advocating the standards of good conduct." He was painfully deliberate.

"No, one experience doesn't," I continued excitedly, "nor does the fact that you have been drawn into no less than five newspaper scandals, within my recollection, disqualify you. But you know and I know that no man lives, even to middle age, without having many things in his life which are not easily explained as compatible with the best ideals. And every man also knows that he has made many mistakes. Some he is sorry for and some, if he

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is honest, make him proud. I've learned within a few weeks that a man may make some mistakes in life that he should be proud to wear upon his forehead like the scars of a fight for noble things. That's what those mistakes are. The man who is ashamed of those scars is ashamed of the best of his life. He never realizes he has 'trod the sunlit heights.'

"I want to tell you, Dr. Grace, if somewhere in those scandals which you deny with such disdain there isn't a mistake or two of that kind, I'm sorry for you! You may not like to show the scars but I hope you are proud of them!"

"I have no scars of scandal," said the doctor harshly. "Calumny may have attacked me but it has never left a mark."

"If you deny it," I said, half-ironically, "it must be so. Just as I said, I am sorry for you. But, you can't affect me with your advice if you don't know what a fine thing it is to make a big mistake. Of course, you've made mistakes and if you haven't made big ones it's

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because you never took a big chance. Think of that! You must have led a dull life."

"I have found life very satisfactory," said the older man, distinctly nettled at being put in an attitude of defense. "Much more satisfactory than you will find the life towards which your present course is leading you."

"Satisfactory!" I retorted. "Oh, doubtless! I don't want a satisfactory life. You mean satisfactory to the common judgment. I might have wanted that kind a month ago. I didn't have anything else to live for then. But since that time I've fallen in love."

I heard at least two grunts, probably three.

"Yes, I've fallen in love. I want a big life, a full life, a life of hazard and achievement. You think I've made a mistake. If I have its the grandest thing I've ever done. I'm going to go on making mistakes until I guess right!

"Oh, don't worry, Dora," I concluded. "I'm just talking. This first mistake suits me very well. I don't anticipate a long horrifying list of additional blunders. But by the

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way, Edith, I'll tell you one thing, when this mistake becomes a marriage it's going to be a real marriage. The time of hesitation being past, my wife and I are going to be good sports in life and play the game according to the rules. That's fair play with each other and with the rest of the world. The troubles in the marriage game aren't caused by dogmas or duties; they come from broken rules.

"That's my answer to this family conference. I'm doing what no one else here is doing, except possibly George; and I'm not sure of him. I'm going to play the game fair.—Can we adjourn for coffee now and pass the pipe of peace?"

They all agreed afterward that I had talked a great deal and seemed very fond of the sound of my own voice. And all except George said I was very obstinate and should be left to my fate. George said I was pig-headed but probably on the right track.

The next evening Gwenn and I revisited Winkler's as an "anniversary" celebration, it

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being three weeks from the night of my avowal! And so it happened that we finished our absurd pilgrimage in the place where it began. For there and on that night the long pursuit of Gwenn was ended.

CHAPTER XIV

MELODRAMA AT WINKLER'S

“ONE night here is like a thousand others, isn't it,” said Gwenn, as we made our way to a table. “There's your friend, Babette, and her yellow satellite.”

“It seems so,” I responded, exhibiting an utter lack of prophetic insight. “I suppose now and then there's a drunken row and it must be pretty wild and nasty on New Year's Eve. But most of the time it's not a very lively show. There's our old friend Gibley in the far corner.”

“I noticed him,” she said disdainfully. “What a sordid thing his daily life must be. I certainly hope for some girl's sake that he never marries.”

“He probably will. Even that sort of a man gets bored with this in time and manages to

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delude some immature girl with the idea that he is a 'man of the world,' because of his familiarity with the under side of life."

The unhappy songster arose and noisily sobbed out a ballad about "days gone by" and "the big, red, harvest moon." A party of very young "college boys," alumni of down-town haberdasheries, applauded violently. The vocalist graciously repeated the pathetic refrain.

"I shouldn't think the women here would care for such songs," suggested Gwenn. "You say a good share of them come from small towns. I came from a small town and if I had dropped into this life, I wouldn't like to hear about 'the harvest moon.'"

"Yet it seems to make a hit with them," I said pointing around. "Even Babette's blond is applauding with special emphasis."

"Have you noticed how restless our 'shadow' has been to-night?" asked Gwenn. "He has gone out and come back several times."

"I don't see him now," I said glancing over my shoulder.

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“No,” she answered, “he has just stepped out again. Oh, Gilbert! Gilbert!” she half rose in terror, clutching my arm. I twisted round in my chair. Curlew was standing in the doorway! In a moment he had sighted his quarry and was striding straight to us across the slippery floor, heedless alike of the scattered dancers and the uncertain footing. His face was set in a hard scowl, his deep eyes almost invisible and his strong fingers contorted viciously as though the stiffly swung arms struggled for release from the broad shoulders.

His first word was to me:—

“You didn’t keep away, did you? I’ll discuss that with you later!”

He faced Gwenn.

“So you thought this life better than what I offered you!”

She looked up at him, not with any sign of fear but rather with a puzzled air. Her lips moved but without sound.

“Mr. Curlew,” I said, rising, “if Miss—if you feel that your company is wanted here, I

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suggest that you sit down. If not, you had better leave. This is hardly the place for a scene."

He didn't even look at me.

"Do you remember what you said that night on the river?"

"The river?" she said, vaguely.

"My God! Don't you even remember?"

"Curlew!" I said brusquely. "I can't permit you—"

I put a hand on his shoulder. He whirled around and glared at me.

"Wait a minute! Then I'll be ready for you."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Gwenn, "in the canoe!"

"The canoe," he snarled. "Are you trying to play with me? There's something strange about you. The ring!"

He reached across the table and seized her fingers. I grabbed at his left wrist, but he had pulled off the little ruby ring with his right hand before I could act. I expected a furious

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struggle. Instead he turned a face of amazement upon me and said:

"It came off easily! It didn't stick at the joint!"

He held the ring in front of him staring confusedly at Gwenn. She took the ring from his hand and slipped it on again.

Of course, the entire room was watching our party. A burly man who had just entered the hall headed for us, probably the "bouncer," hastily summoned to quell the disturbance.

"You've made enough trouble," I said in a low voice to Curlew. "You'd better get out."

I jerked him away from the table, but his muscles recoiled like heavy springs. His face flushed up angrily.

"You—" he began like a growling bulldog. His hand slipped toward my throat. It was no time for nice calculations. I dropped his wrist and struck out at him with desperate strength. He had the advantage of me in every way physically. But in my rage at his in-

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solent treatment of Gwenn I would have taken any amount of punishment gladly to have done him harm. My blow caught him full in the face and he stumbled back into the arms of the oncoming "bouncer." I sprang forward, but the "bouncer" wrapped both arms around Curlew and swung him aside.

"Just a minute," he said quietly. "This man is mine."

To my surprise he held the strong engineer helpless.

"Are you going to put up a scrap?" said the "bouncer" to his victim, "or will you come peaceably with me? Uncle Sam wants to see you! There are a couple more of his boys in this room. Must we be unkind to you?"

"I'll go quietly," said Curlew, suddenly becoming very calm.

The manager of the hall, a coarse, fat individual, waddled up, followed by a couple of mean-looking waiters.

"Now, what's this row?" he demanded truculently.

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The supposed "bouncer" opened his coat slightly, giving a glimpse of a metal badge.

"Would you like to go up to the marshal's office with me, too?" he asked pleasantly. "I think they have a few 'white slave' cases you'd like to see."

"Excuse me!" hurriedly protested the red-faced one. "Nothing doing, boys." The waiters backed off.

"What does it all mean?" I whispered to Gwenn.

"I don't know," she answered blindly. "It can't be the old trouble. I'm sure it isn't anything wicked. He isn't a bad man. Find out where they are taking him, Gilbert. Perhaps we ought to do something for him!"

The idea struck me humorously, but I asked the government inspector.

"He'll be at the Federal building—marshal's office—or in the County Jail, for a few days at least," he answered. "Who are you, by the way?"

I took out a business card.

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"Surety bonds," he read. "Well, you're Johnny-on-the-spot, because it'll take a big bond to get him out! Who's the lady? She's not one of these!" He was a better observer than Gibley, whom I saw across the hall, slipping toward the door.

"No," I said, "but she's a friend of mine. I'll vouch for her. She isn't mixed up with him." That sounded almost like a lie.

He grinned sardonically.

"No, I observed that they were utter strangers," he remarked. Then he added comfortably. "I'm sure we don't need her on the main job, but I want to know where to reach her if anything comes up about to-night. What's her address?"

He took out his notebook.

"I don't care to have that man know," I said pointing to Curlew, who was speaking to a waiter.

"He's not exactly a friend of mine," smiled the inspector. "I don't tell him all my secrets."

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"Have a drink!" called out Curlew.

"No, thanks," said his captor, as he noted down Gwenn's address. "I don't like to be arbitrary, but, none for you either. You're under arrest."

"All right," said Curlew, with an unpleasant grin. "May I tip the waiter?"

"If it gives you any pleasure," said the other. "Now we must be moving. Good-night, Mr. Winston."

He and Curlew strolled toward the exit like a pair of friends but I noticed that two men sitting near the door rose at the same time and followed them out. Evidently they had felt fairly sure that Curlew would make no resistance but had taken no chances.

The moment the star of our little melodrama had left we realized how conspicuous we were. The entire hall was talking about us and probably a hundred different speculations were in currency. I helped Gwenn into her long cloak, retrieved my coat from the check-room and we hurried out into the crisp night.

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"I don't believe we will be shadowed any longer," I suggested. "Let's walk to your house."

The bracing chill of oncoming winter seemed to clear my puzzled brain and stray sentences fraught with interest recurred to me. Perhaps Curlew had been mistaken.

"I don't believe you're the girl he thought you were," I hazarded.

"I'm not," she said with sudden frankness. "Didn't you guess that before?"

"I'm afraid I didn't. I'm pretty stupid, you see."

"I didn't want you to guess for fear, in your anxiety about me, you might hint it to him."

"Is the whole story coming out now?" I asked, hopefully.

"Maybe," she said. "I don't understand this arrest though. That was a United States officer, wasn't it?"

"A Secret Service man, I gathered."

"Then it can't be for the old trouble, I sup-

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pose. I always understood that was a local matter—just for our home state, I mean.”

“What was the old trouble?”

“I’m going to tell you the whole story tomorrow, or the next day,” she said. “Let me tell it all at once! Meanwhile, will you do something for me?”

“Anything *you* ask,” I announced, with a shade of double meaning. “You know I have faith.”

“He ought to have a lawyer, a good one.”

“Probably he has one,” I suggested, “considering the hazardous business he’s evidently in.”

“No,” she said. “He never prepares beforehand for trouble. He’ll have no way in jail of making sure that he gets a good man. Couldn’t you suggest to him that you would recommend one?”

“He’d probably expect me to send him the biggest fool I knew as a suitable revenge. Anyhow, I feel certain that he knows people here who would help him. He must have busi-

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ness friends like Gibley. However, I'll go over and see him to-morrow and ask him, if it will please you. I'll suggest brother-in-law Carfax. I suspect that Curlew is mixed up in a diplomatic row. Carfax would be just the man. He's had foreign governments for clients at times and knows the ropes."

"That's fine of you," said Gwenn enthusiastically. "For that what shall I do?"

"Just remember it when you say good-night to me in a few minutes," I suggested, jokingly, "and don't put the key in the door quite so soon as last time."

She made no answer, but she remembered; for when we reached the narrow dark vestibule, she handed me the key! Quite a long while afterward she took it from me gently and opened the door herself. I promptly apologized for having failed to note how chilly it was. She must be half frozen! No, she said, with a soft smile, that she had been very warmly wrapped up, but that it was a trifle late. I didn't regard that as important but,

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after condensing my ideas on the subject into a very brief half-hour, decided to depart as a convincing proof of the domination of mind over matter in a strong man! I bade her an affectionate but firm farewell, incidentally making a luncheon engagement for the following noon—that is, for noon of the same day, and turned my face homewards. It was such a gorgeous night, I had so much to think about, and “owl” cars seemed so repulsive, that I decided to walk the four or five miles, a trifling task for my eager spirit! As a result I crawled into my bed at about half-past four weary and content.

CHAPTER XV

DISGRACING THE FAMILY

AT half-past seven I awoke suddenly to find Dora standing over me with the morning paper in one hand and a wet towel in the other.

“Look!” she hissed at me, in the approved manner of the stage villainess. “Look at this! So that’s why you came in at five o’clock!”

Women always exaggerate so. I protested that it was only half-past four and with heavy eyes tried to see what she was talking about. She pointed dramatically at the paper but, in the general blur of black and white, I could make out nothing until suddenly my own name stood out in the center of a headline. Then I became wide-awake!

“FAMOUS FILIBUSTER CAPTURED AT WINKLER’S
SECRET SERVICE AIDED BY GILBERT WINSTON
WELL-KNOWN CLUBMAN

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MYSTERIOUS SWEETHEART BETRAYS JAMES CURLEW SOLDIER OF FORTUNE"

Then followed a most lurid and false account of our little drama. According to the paper the Secret Service men had discovered that Curlew had a sweetheart in Chicago of whom he was very jealous and who had become the "constant companion" (a nice phrase) of one Gilbert Winston, prominent "man-about-town" (not a refined expression)! So Curlew had put a detective agency on the girl's trail and the agency with enterprising loyalty (to the Government, not to its client!) had tipped this off to the Secret Service. The federal agents had enlisted Winston's aid (news to me!) and arranged a trap. Curlew, "Led by the siren call of love," had walked into the ambushade. After a brief struggle with the "debonair" Winston (a choice adjective!) the furious soldier of fortune had been overpowered by the Secret Service men and "disarmed"! Winston had immediately slipped out of "Winkler's notorious place" with the mysterious woman

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whose name could not be learned (for that much grace I blessed the federal officer).

It appeared that J. A. Gibley—vice-president of the Gibley Arms Company—had been deceived by Curlew into assisting the filibuster in the purchase and shipment of a large order of rifles destined for revolutionary use in Costa Rica (this was probably a pure guess). On account of certain diplomatic tensities incidental to American activities in the Canal Zone the whole business was quite unlawful and it was understood that Mr. Gibley had given patriotic assistance to the authorities. Mr. Gibley said over the telephone from his residence (a polite phrase probably for some disreputable place where a reporter had cornered him!) that he did not wish to be interviewed and deprecated any notice of his part in the affair.

The article concluded:

“Mr. Winston’s sister answered the telephone at his apartment in the exclusive Hyde Park residence section and stated that Mr. Winston was not at home, but that she expected him at any time. She denied

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any knowledge of any other address at which Mr. Winston could be reached!"

"Well!" said sister, as I finally looked up from the paper.

"Nice little story, isn't it?" said I. "Parts of it are almost true!"

"I don't care whether it's true or not," she announced tragically. "It's in the paper!"

"It surely is," I admitted. "Side by side with the announcement that the eminent Mr. Pinkington-Jones has left home coincidentally with the French governess!"

"How you can think there is anything funny in it, I can't understand."

"That," I asserted, "is because you don't understand the story. Permit me to assert that my participation in this affair is a source of satisfaction to me. I do not feel that it was at all discreditable."

"Discreditable!" she cried. "The whole thing's so common and vulgar. The only decent thing about you in the article is the suggestion that at least you acted like a gentle-

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man. I suppose you are proud that you were cool and brave in danger."

"My dear Dora," I replied, "I hate to disappoint you but there again the article is untrue. I was scared to death and I am sure I punched the gentleman in a most vulgar and unscientific manner."

"Oh dear, oh dear," and Dora collapsed to a sitting posture on the side of the bed. "It's just a dreadful, nasty mess. I can't possibly go to that Midgeley tea this afternoon. I shan't dare to show my face in public for a week!"

"I'm really sorry," I began contritely, "that this notoriety has arisen to embarrass you.—May I mention that you are sitting on my knee and it hurts?—Thanks—Now if you will close the windows, turn on the radiator and start the water in the bathtub, I will arise gracefully and join you at breakfast."

Dora left the room hurriedly without doing any of these things, but at least I had turned tearful emotion into the channels of wrath, so I arose quite cheerfully.

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We had just seated ourselves at the breakfast table when the telephone rang.

"More reporters, I suppose," said Dora gloomily, adding a moment later: "No, it's Edith—she's coming right up in the machine and wants to be sure you will be here. Will you wait?"

"Yes, tell her she ought to send George down to business in the motor and come up in the street car herself. But if she will take me back down-town with her I will forgive her.

"Now," I continued as Dora returned to the table, "let's have a peaceful breakfast. I don't want to tell this tale twice in a half hour. I shall wait until Edith comes."

With the morning sun lying warm across the cheerful table, with its daily burden of gay breakfast china, bright silver and chuckling coffee urn, the exciting events of a few hours past seemed like some foolish dream. Yet there lay the morning gossip before me with its sprawling headlines and vehement half-truths. Like most of the startling events of

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life the need of action and the brevity of the whole affair had given me little thought of "here is an adventure" while it was happening. So that now in retrospect it was hard to believe that I had really had an adventure, had participated in a matter of public interest. Then again, the short encounter with Curlew was only an incident in the great affair of my life—in the very serious business of deep, reciprocated passion for a fascinating woman. That was something worth while.

Of course, Edith and Dora couldn't understand my attitude!

After Edith's rustling arrival I patiently revised the newspaper yarns to a semblance of truth. Edith had brought with her the Yellow King's daily output of extravagance and false romance and that required minute analysis and refutation of an amazing number of false details and unwarranted inferences.

At last, however, I put the facts before them; the facts as I knew them, which were none too pleasing and not very complete.

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“Well, I should think you’d feel like a fool,” said Edith.

“I do,” was my answer. “You see, I’m in love. Doesn’t it feel fine? Or don’t you remember? Perhaps you weren’t ever in love with George?”

“I was silly about him once, if that’s what you mean,” she said tartly.

“The insinuation being, I assume, that you were never really in love until you met R. H.? He appeals to your common sense! Of course, you don’t feel silly about him?”

“Certainly not,” she insisted. “Boys and girls are silly. Grown people look things squarely in the face.”

“Poor Edith!” I said compassionately to Dora. “Think of trying to look love ‘squarely in the face’—it’s like staring the sun out of countenance. I can see you analyzing the spectrum; red for passion; green for jealousy; violet for devotion. Edith! Edith! When you see a rainbow in the sky, worship it afar, the divine, the unattainable. Don’t look at the

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little man-made imitation and think you are in touch with the infinite!"

"How poetic!" she sneered.

"Everyone really in love feels poetic," said I. "You convict yourself of a false passion."

"What I wish to know," announced Dora, "is what Gilbert is going to do about this affair. I don't approve of Edith's ideas but, at least, she has some respect for the good opinion of society."

"'High' society, or society in general?" I asked.

"Both."

"Let me assure you," I replied, happily, "that society in general probably regards me as quite a hero this morning."

"That will not be the attitude of the people with whom I usually associate," said Dora.

"Nor of my friends," chimed in Edith.

"Dear me," I said, "I suppose I've been guilty of that horrible thing, 'bad form.' Well, all that you girls can do is to disown me. Just pass me up as 'queer' and tell your swagger

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friends that we never have been 'sympathetic.' That's the customary way of avoiding responsibility for awkward relatives. Even our 'best people' have relatives of whom they are not proud! Of course, the horrible fact can't be faced and admitted, but it can be kept out of sight."

"It's all very well for you to sneer," said Dora, "but you are just as fond of social position as either Edith or I, only like most bachelors you are too lazy to attend to your obligations, so you haven't got on very well. Now you pretend to disdain it all." This was a favorite theme with both my sisters.

"It annoys me beyond words," I retorted, "to see that you've sunk so low in your sense of values that you cannot conceive that everybody does not rate an invitation to the Midgeleys as high as you do. That's true of all social climbers. They can't believe that everybody doesn't play the game who can. Because I like chess must I also love checkers? Because I enjoy the book of life, must I therefore covet

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a de luxe edition of selected trivialities bound in satin and soaked in perfume?"

"It's very easy to be moral and decry the wickedness of smart people who really know how to live," said Edith. "But it is good society that is responsible for most of the beautiful things in life, art and music and all such things—" she finished vaguely.

"Dear me, what a moldy untruth we have dragged to the light." I was incensed. "Did you ever know a social leader to patronize really obscure, struggling genius? It couldn't be done. The artist would be a fraud who would tolerate it. No, the real workers work alone, until the world begins to feel the thrill of a new voice, to feel the power of a new hand, to feel the pressure of new ideas. Then when the world is ready to be shaped a little by the strength that has grown in darkness, in solitude, in pain—then stupid wealth comes along and claims a new slave to be dragged behind the gaudy chariots. With food and drink and petting the idlers soften the clean

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hard muscles. They dull the alert brain. They drag him down from a hard, glorious youth to a sleek, conceited old age and ask that their 'encouragement of the artist' should be praised! Fattening the lions! That is the service of Wealth to Art!"

"Is that from your last Iconoclast Banquet speech?" asked Dora superciliously.

"Yes, it is," I admitted, "and since you are resolved on teaching me things I won't learn I'll finish the speech and tell you why!

"I've no deep hostility to so-called high society. I don't take any demagogic position and rave about marble palaces built on rotting souls. It's true, of course, that practically every big fortune is a stolen one. Even when men succeed in 'legitimate business' a thousand lives pay with the daily misery of poverty for one family's usurious profits. And when a man cleans up a few millions in a few years it's pretty plain that he is more of a menace to his fellows, and more of a savage, than the most ferocious crook in all the penitentiaries.

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But that's a temporary evil. A man tries to mortgage the future of thousands for the pleasure of his dynasty. While he lives he may succeed, but luxury, disease and eternal laws start spreading the money around again as soon as he dies.

"I don't feel bitterly at either the fools or the careworn men of responsibility in the social aristocracy. But the game they play is stupid amusement for stupid people. I feel ashamed when people imagine that I am so vain and so small a man as to wish to join in such dull sport. The only real interest is found in the constant trifling with the most serious thing in life, the interdependence of men and women.

"Trifling!" Dora attempted to stop the flow.

"I say, trifling, because the risks of intimacy are less, and infinitely more worth while, if that intimacy has a purpose. But the intimacy whose sole purpose is increased intimacy is a pretty rotten thing. Yet what is one to get from men and women, not necessarily fools, but trained to be fools in life? Take the aver-

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age dinner—a wonderful opportunity for sharpening the wits. But the ideal companion is a capable flirt. I wouldn't object to that, if flirting had any possibilities. I learned it when I was eighteen in about ten lessons given by a very cute little blond teacher."

"She may have been cute," broke in Edith, "but she was a poor teacher!"

"You say that because I don't flirt unless I wish to and I so seldom do. Did you ever play tit-tat-to in school?"

"Oh, yes," they answered in chorus.

"That's flirting, pictorially represented. You can learn to play like an old stager in five minutes. It has absolutely no possibilities, yet it has the silly fascination to be derived out of always thinking that something is just about to happen—something which never does."

"Have you finished the lecture?" asked Dora wearily.

"Yes, now you may begin. All I ask is that you will not talk to me about social position.

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My social position is my value as a man, not my eligibility as a dinner guest of the Midgeleys. Nor will I sympathize with your loss of caste through my follies. As I said, I think the stupid amusements are all right for the stupid people but when I see really intelligent persons trailing after vulgar wealth in search of social position I feel ashamed for my friends, whose vanity is satisfied at the cost of self-respect. You have a mind, Dora. What do you do with it? Do you leave it with your wraps when you go to the Midgeleys?"

"There are a great many very bright people at the Midgeleys."

"Of course, there are parasites like yourself, but whom would you name as the three most brilliant men, that really belong with that crowd?"

"Jack Deerfield, Mr. Midgeley and Henry Marsh," said Dora promptly.

"I knew you'd name them," I said. "Everyone drags out those three for the defense when I speak of stupidity and orchids."

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Deerfield has a gutter mind which is naturally interesting to those unfamiliar with gutters. But I heard him chaff barroom loafers during that political campaign of his and he made a poor show. He's only brilliant because he's out of place. He should be a waiter in Winkler's! Midgeley is a great executive, a big business man, so what he says is important; but he himself will never add a thought to the world.

"Henry Marsh—poor Henry—he's the really misplaced man. He cried on my shoulder one night after too many cocktails because everything he said had a double meaning and nobody ever caught but one. He said he never knew which one would arrive. But the other was sure to be wasted. 'Lost little pearls,' he called them. 'I'm a pearl fisher for swine,' he moaned. Yes, Marsh is misplaced and he knows it. If he didn't have money he could associate with interesting people and be happy."

"So you are perfectly willing to sacrifice our

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social position for your own cheap pleasure," said Dora violently.

"‘Our position,’" I quoted. "‘Edith’s social prestige isn’t at stake. She’s going to run away with somebody’s husband. That’s hardly a social coup.’"

"I shan’t do anything which will get in the papers," announced Edith.

"Ah, ha!" I cried, "at last the standard of ethics is made clear to me. Don’t do anything that will put your name in the paper. On what pages, Edith? I often see your name in the society columns and I know you’ve sent the notice in yourself—so that must be all right."

"I’m not advertised in some discreditable affair."

"Neither was I. I helped capture a bad man, according to the papers."

"In company with an unknown woman, in a disreputable place."

"Now I understand it," I shouted. "Don’t let your name appear in the papers in connection with unknown people or disreputable

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places—disreputable places not frequented by nice people. I had to put in that qualification because you often lunch at the toughest hotel in town and you dine occasionally with the Pigglers where more disreputable things happen than anywhere else in the city outside of the red-light district.”

“You’re quite hopeless, I see,” complained Dora. “I only hope for one thing, that you will not announce your engagement right away and that you won’t be in a hurry to marry. I hope you will at least take time to find out her real name before you give her to us as a sister-in-law!”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I have no intention of marrying before next week and when I present her as a sister-in-law her real name will be Winston. By the way, there is no need of teasing you unnecessarily. The lady’s real name she gave me permission last night to tell to my family. It’s Gwenn Fenton. And, as for her family, her brother-in-law is Rex Har-

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bury of Detroit. You'll find him in the Blue Book and in Who's Who in Snobland."

"Rex Harbury!" exclaimed Edith, with a little gasp.

"Yes, quite an ultra-respectable. You've heard of him?"

"I—I—" she paused and bit her lips.

"R. H." I shouted in sudden inspiration.

"R. H. By George! this is rich!"

"Is he R. H.?" asked Dora.

"Yes, he is," said Edith with a faint simper of pride.

I laughed loud and long.

"This is certainly rich!" I chortled. "My married sister protesting against her bachelor brother's low entanglement with Harbury's sister-in-law but maintaining stoutly the propriety of her affair with the gentleman himself!"

"I didn't know she was connected with good people," replied Edith.

"Of course, that makes it all right," I said.

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"It makes no difference what you do so long as you do it with the right kind of people. You're a sincere little democrat, aren't you?"

"I never pretended to be a democrat," she retorted. "I believe in an aristocracy of well-bred, educated people."

"You forgot one adjective, 'wealthy,'" I suggested. "Must have money, or the whole thing will be very vulgar. Elopement to St. Joe is a disgusting affair but flight from Palm Beach to Reno is a beautiful romance. In the classic language of Shakespere, 'go to!' Edith; you have become absurd!"

The family conference broke up immediately. Even Dora had nothing to say until I stood in the hall putting on my overcoat. Then, as I ceased bantering the two for a moment, she remarked casually:

"If you would care to have me call on your fiancée, Gilbert, I shall be glad to do so. What is her address?"

"I shall also," said Edith, unlatching the door and stepping into the outer hallway.

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"I'll find out what her receiving day is," I answered mockingly. "I expected you would wish to know several days ago, but you both forgot to inquire, so I didn't ask her!"

As I started to close the door behind me a better thought occurred.

"Don't you bother about it, Dora," I said; "it has just appealed to me that an informal meeting would be much more comfortable for all concerned. I'll give a little breakfast at about two A.M. at Winkler's, and ask you all there, Miss Fenton, Dora, Edith and George and the Harburys! I'll find out when the Harburys are going to be in town and let you all know the date!"

I chuckled unpleasantly all the way down stairs but Edith showed great self-control. Probably for once she didn't take me seriously.

CHAPTER XVI

A BUSY MORNING

THE United States Marshal's office was a disappointment to me. I had expected to pass through a steel door into stone-walled rooms. Instead I found myself in a very ordinary place of business heavily carpeted and comfortably fitted with mahogany furniture.

"Go through that door in the corner," answered an indifferent clerk, in response to my request to see Curlew.

I walked into a big, bare room, where several men were lounging. At least here there were bars on the windows! Then I discovered a big cage in the corner and the whole place took on an ugly look. It showed that there was a harsh power behind all this careless exterior, that force was the master. I realized that men were brought here who must be chained and

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guarded like vicious animals, men who must be beaten like beasts when they resisted, that some of them must come from underground dens, the foulness of which I could only vaguely imagine. Then there were men like Curlew—who rose from a chair near a window and greeted me with belligerent embarrassment. His tired lids drooped over the keen eyes.

“There has been some mistake,” I said lamely.

“No mistake about this,” he said harshly, sweeping his hand toward the cage.

“I mean that I think we have been working at cross-purposes.”

“Perhaps. But you didn’t play square!”

“Yes, I did,” I retorted. “I didn’t obey you, but you had no right to give orders. Let’s forget that. Now, she has asked me to see if there is anything you would like done.”

“She,” he repeated. Then a cunning look came into his eyes. “Who is ‘she’?”

“You know,” I evaded.

“I’m not sure I do,” he said slowly.

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"Perhaps she is not the one you think she is," I suggested.

"Perhaps," he admitted. He changed the subject abruptly. "I'm all right in this matter. They won't dare to do anything to me. When a lawyer puts it up to them, they'll quit."

"You have a lawyer, of course," I suggested.

"No, I haven't," he said, with entire frankness. "But I'll get a good one. I should have arranged before only I didn't expect to be caught—here."

"Would you care to have me recommend someone?" I asked.

He looked at me shrewdly.

"You're not trying to make sure that the case is messed, are you?" he asked with a sort of sad grin.

"No," I laughed. "But I was thinking this over this morning after I read the papers and I realized that there were only two or three men in town who really 'knew the ropes' in these diplomatic tangles. One of them happens

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to be my brother-in-law. I'm not drumming up business for him, but he is just the kind of man you must want."

"What is his name?"

"Carfax, George Carfax."

"I don't know him," said Curlew, "but if you say he's the man I would be much obliged if you would ask him to come to see me. I'm not broke, by the way. This is not a charity case."

"I'll get him at once," I said, glad to end this difficult interview.

After a talk with Carfax I passed the balance of the morning most unhappily in my office. First I read all the morning papers to be fully informed as to the varieties of untruth in circulation concerning my night's adventure. Then the telephone calls began. Friends representing every conceivable attitude detailed their feelings. The sympathizers were the worst, "so sorry" I had been "mixed up in such a queer-looking affair." Of course, they knew it was all right, but others who did not

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know me so well were "certain to misunderstand."

The "joshers" were in the majority. "Is this Winkler's Annex?" asked one, as I took up the phone. "Well, let me speak to Mr. Winston, the Protector of Misplaced Innocence."

"Hello!" cried another, "Secret Service Bureau? Let me have Sherlock Winston, the Slippery Sleuth."

Dr. Grace called up and did an "I-told-you-so" act, until I hung up the receiver.

Gibley telephoned to deny having been authority for numerous lies accredited to him.

It was a very jolly forenoon!

At about twelve-thirty I went over to Michigan Avenue to meet Gwenn for luncheon.

In the hotel parlor she greeted me with happy eyes.

"Dot is here," she exclaimed, "with her husband. Mr. and Mrs. Harbury, you know. I promised that we would lunch with them."

"Why not they with us?" I suggested.

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"No, no," she decided. "My family must do a little entertaining now and then."

"Evidently you didn't like the entertainment I provided last night."

She grimaced at the recollection.

"Oh, how is Mr. Curlew?"

"He says that he is all right," I replied. "Carfax is with him now—I told him that I would be here for lunch so he may drop in if he has any news."

A few minutes later I was introduced to Gwenn's sister and her husband—the famous "R. H."

To my surprise he did not appear at all like a home-breaker. He looked the hard-working, quick-scheming American business man to the last inch. He seemed reasonably fond of his wife. But I would have sworn at first sight that he would never for a moment consider permitting any romantic entanglement to swing him out of the steady, well-planned career of progress toward whatever goal he had chosen.

His wife bore a strong family resemblance

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to her sister, Gwenn, but their obvious differences in character had left plain marks upon their faces. They had the same appealing gray eyes, but where the wistfulness in Gwenn's merged into self-reliance Dot's glance was positively pathetic in its utter dependence. Her chin had an irresolute droop while Gwenn's was set firm in a most attractive upward tilt. Dot had the same heavy masses of hair but worn with an elaborateness of coiffure that added to the general "doll-baby" effect which, to me, characterized her. Her voice had a slight, artificial hauteur which both amused and irritated me. No, I did not care particularly for Dorothy!

"Well, well," said Harbury, after we were all seated in a corner of the crowded grill room. "You and Gwenn had quite a little adventure last night, Mr. Winston. At least so the papers inform me!"

"Really," I protested, "I hope you understand—"

"Oh, Gwenn has told us all about it! Plucky

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thing for her to do, to try to throw Curlew off the trail by such methods. But, I say frankly, if we had been here we would never have permitted it, would we, Dorothy?"

"No, of course not," said Dorothy, a bit dubiously. "Still it was awfully nice of you, Gwenn, and of you, Mr. Winston, to help her."

"You're prejudiced," remarked Harbury. "The fear of Curlew has become a disease with you. I don't believe that he would be so terrible if he knew the real situation."

"You don't know him!" said Dorothy.

"You evidently do," I suggested.

"Yes," she answered, shrugging her shoulders. "I know him and I'm afraid of him."

A bell-boy laid a card in front of Harbury. He looked much annoyed for a moment. Then said: "Please excuse me for a few minutes," and followed the man from the room.

We continued a desultory conversation for a few moments, when, glancing out of a near-by window I saw Carfax approaching the hotel. He stopped for a moment and spoke to the

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chauffeur of a car standing at the curb. It was his own car! In a moment I was confronted by a most unpleasant situation. Edith must be in the hotel. She had evidently sent a card in to Harbury. As soon as George was introduced he would also connect her presence with Harbury's. Would he preserve that even temper for which he was noted, or would there be a scene?

George entered the dining room and, peering around, saw me standing at our table.

"Gwenn," I said, "I wish to present my brother-in-law, Mr. Carfax. Mrs. Harbury—"

"Yes, we've met before, in Detroit," said George, with a shade of emphasis.

"Mrs. Harbury and Miss—Littlefield are sisters," I explained.

George puckered his forehead at the name.

"My real name is Fenton," explained Gwenn. "I used the name Littlefield in Chicago to keep the persistent Mr. Curlew off my trail."

"Ah! I see," said George. "Is Mr. Harbury—?"

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"Mr. Harbury has just stepped out," said Dorothy quickly. "Won't you join us?"

"No, I must hurry on to another engagement," he replied. "I dropped in to explain to those interested about Mr. Curlew's case."

"Wait a minute," I said, acting under impulse. "I'll go find Harbury. He wouldn't wish to miss the story, I'm sure."

In a retired corner of the "Tapestry room" I found Edith and "R. H." engaged in very earnest conversation. Both looked much confused as I approached. I dispensed with all preliminaries.

"Mr. Harbury," I said, "I should like to speak with you a moment."

"Now, Gilbert—" began Edith in a tone of passionate vexation.

"Mr. Carfax has joined our little party," I said quietly, with malicious intent, "and I have come to bring back Mr. Harbury. But first I wish to have a word with you in private. I'm sure you'll excuse us, Edith."

Edith was silenced.

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"Mr. Harbury," I said, when we had walked out of hearing distance, "I don't know you very well but I would like to make a few suggestions—"

This was just my way of getting started. I hadn't a thing in my head to say. Happily he saved me any further trouble.

"Mr. Winston," he replied, "I might as well confess that I'm an ass, but not a knave; please understand that. I see that you partly understand this situation. Let me make it still clearer. Mrs. Carfax and I have been carrying on a sort of long-distance flirtation for some time and the idea of either one regarding it seriously never entered my head until recently. My wife and I get along very well together and from all appearances I should assume that Mr. and Mrs. Carfax were a fairly congenial couple."

"They are," I interrupted.

"From the little I've seen of him he appears to be a fine fellow. I'm not particularly conceited and I would be slow to believe that his

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wife cared more for me than for him. In fact I don't believe it!" he ended defiantly.

"Neither do I," was my cheerful response.

"Well, then, why the devil!" he burst out. "Oh, if I say anything I'll talk like a cad. If I don't say anything I'll make a bad situation worse."

"Let me say it," I suggested. "I'm Mrs. Carfax's brother so I needn't try to pose as chivalric. Edith is still in the 'sweet-sixteen' stage of life. Some women never outgrow it. To her, life has no serious responsibilities. Of course, the play-child is out of place in the work-a-day world, so she lives in a neurotic fairy land. When a fairy prince comes along and touches a nerve of passion she vibrates clear into what she calls her soul, which, as a matter of fact, is just an avidity for physical and mental exhilaration."

"You're pretty harsh on her," he objected.

"You would be, too," I retorted, "if you knew George Carfax as well as I do. To continue, you came along, a bit bored, I think,

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by a pleasing but unexciting constant companion—" his eyes narrowed a trifle—"and found a woman whose spirit bounded up at your call. She found a new man, interested in strange, new things, and, most of all, actively interested in her, as almost any man is in a pretty woman who has had no opportunity to bore him. Now, she has taken you as a serious possibility of relief from—not from her husband—but from herself. You, on your part, don't desire to be relieved of either your wife or your own way of living. Am I right?"

"That's about the case," he said, a bit sullenly.

"Then you'd better let me explain it to Edith," I finished abruptly.

"Oh, that's a weak, cowardly thing to do," he said with a flash of the spirit for which I had been waiting. "I was so struck in a heap by her attitude that I couldn't quite get myself together. It's my mistake. It's up to me to try to square things."

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"I'll wait for you," I suggested, "as I promised to bring you back to the table with me."

He returned to Edith, who had been flashing furious wireless messages at me from her secluded corner. Edith evidently gathered his intentions very quickly, for in a few minutes she came sweeping across the room with a most embarrassed "R. H." scurrying, red-faced, behind her. I halted the progress of the indignant goddess at the door.

"Let me by," she commanded in the approved manner of melodrama.

"Just a moment, Edith," I said firmly. "George is downstairs, looking for you. There is no reason why he should know anything about this but he would think it strange if you ran away from him."

"He can think what he pleases," she cried angrily. "I'm going home."

"Just a word, Edith," begged Harbury, at her elbow.

She expunged him from the scene with a

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rapid glance full of that historic fury of a
"woman scorned."

"I don't care for any more words—with anyone," she announced icily.

"Edith," I pleaded. "Haven't you ridden rough-shod over George's feelings long enough? The least you can do now is to wait for him and not make this situation any worse."

Her lip trembled and she suddenly shut her eyes. Then without a word she turned and walked back to her corner. I followed her and, just to make sure, whispered:

"I'll tell him you are here. He is going to explain to me about Curlew. Then he'll come right up. That will give you time to calm off."

My speech was not diplomatic and she made no response. Harbury and I walked down stairs in silence. He and George shook hands in a peculiar manner which might be described as "cordial restraint."

"I must run along," said George, peering inquiringly at Harbury and me. "But I came over to explain in a word or two about Cur-

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lew. I had a talk with him and then a conference with the District Attorney. As near as I can judge you are all a bit interested in his future movements.”

“Considerably,” said Harbury.

“My gracious, yes,” sputtered Dorothy.

“It will be no breach of professional confidence,” said Carfax, “especially as Curlew charged me with certain messages to some of you which I must deliver and explain.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE FILIBUSTER

“JIM CURLEW was forced to leave the country some years ago,” began Carfax, “for reasons well known to all present.”

“Except to me,” I interrupted.

Gwenn smiled.

“I’ll tell you all about it, soon,” she promised.

“He wandered around in South America for a time and finally came North to Costa Rica just in time to get mixed up in one of their periodic, teapot-tempest revolutions. The affair was much complicated by United States operations in the Canal Zone.

“Of course, as usual, the ‘nigger in the wood-pile’ was a financial exploitation. Certain capitalists unable to get what they wanted out of the government instigated the revolt to put in

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power an administration which they could own. Also according to precedent there were two factions trying to monopolize the ear at Washington so that United States intervention would aid the 'right' side. The Gibley Arms Company had its agents working with Curlew. But when the row got very warm and the Curlew people lost out in Washington, the Gibleys promptly changed sides and began betraying their customer. That's the sort of 'commercial interest' that is always howling for 'intervention' and 'protection' of 'American rights.' "

Carfax paused in his story long enough to express in a few choice words his opinion of the tribe of Gibley.

"Of course, this Gibley puppy here hasn't the brains to do anything except lie," he concluded. "It's old Peter Gibley in New York, his uncle, who plays the game.

"Well, to go on, Curlew had played fast and loose with this affair for sometime and was making considerable money at it, as well as

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having what he called a good time. He spent a good many months in this country during recent years, apparently searching for someone when not attending to filibustering business—”

Carfax looked around and Harbury, Dorothy and Gwenn all nodded in understanding.

“Big success seemed in his grasp a few weeks ago,” continued George, “when someone in Washington turned traitor. Curlew rushed back to this country to try to save the situation, but the enemy evidently felt sure of their power or they would not have dared to invoke the Secret Service. Of course, many of Curlew’s acts were unlawful, but so were those of all concerned. The purpose of his arrest was to stop his fight, not to punish him. If he were ever dragged into court there would be an international scandal of real proportions. The United States is not the only power which is involved.

“The District Attorney has his instructions and I soon saw that I should have no trouble with him. Curlew is to be released on condi-

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tion of leaving the country and not returning for at least three years. That leaves his enemies free to control the Washington condition. They tried to keep him out of Costa Rica but Curlew stood pat on that. He swore that he should at least have a chance to go back there and fight, even against the United States, for his valuable concessions. So I judge from my conference with the District Attorney that that will be permitted.

“Curlew says that they will try to put him out of the way as soon as he lands there.

“‘But,’ he says, ‘if I’m willing to put my head in the lion’s mouth, I guess they can concede me the privilege. Of course, they know that I’m still pretty strong with the big little bugs down there. They don’t like to see me go back, but I’m going.’

“So we gave them an ultimatum that if they didn’t release him in twenty-four hours, we’d get him out legally and give a full statement to the newspapers. Just now the wires are very hot between here and Washington and the

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District Attorney assures me that everything will be straightened out by nightfall.

"That's Curlew's story in brief," finished Carfax; "so that those anxious for his safety and those anxious to see him out of the country may both feel relieved."

"What were the messages he sent?" asked Harbury.

"One," replied George, "was to the lady with the ruby ring."

Gwenn held up her hand.

"He said to tell her that he had a dim idea of who she was and he sent her his humblest apologies and utmost admiration. He said that he remembered a day, years ago, when two little girls were attacked by a cross dog in front of his father's house. He said he remembered that a little girl called Gwenn stood in front of her sister Dorothy and struck at the dog with a stick until his father ran up and drove the dog away."

"I'd forgotten all about that," said Gwenn. "I was a very little girl then."

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"I remember it," said Dorothy. "I was scared to death. You certainly always were the brave one, Gwenn!"

"Curlew said," continued George, "that when he remembered that incident last night a lot of things cleared up for him. He also said that he realized that he was likely to be an outlaw all his life, hunted and hunting; that it was his nature; that he should never try to drag a woman into such a life. He said to tell the lady of the ring that she need not worry, that he would never trouble her again, but that if he lived, some day he might come back for a friendly visit."

Both Gwenn and Dorothy suddenly produced kerchiefs, to my considerable surprise. Even Harbury seemed quite upset and murmured something about: "Poor fellow!"

"I have also a message for you," said Carfax, turning abruptly upon me. "Curlew said to tell you that your methods had puzzled him a bit but he had finally decided that you meant all right."

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"That's decent of him," I said half-laughing.
"Any more kind words?"

"Yes, one thing further. He said to tell you that he believed you had shown better judgment in your pursuit of romance than he had—whatever that means."

Both Gwenn and Dorothy blushed rather noticeably.

"Now," said Carfax, rising, "your luncheon is coming and I must be going."

As he started away, I stopped him and, out of hearing of the others, said:

"Now I've a little surprise for you. Edith was looking for you a little while ago and I promised to send you to the 'Tapestry Room' if I saw you. I couldn't well invite her to join our party but I thought someone ought to take her to lunch."

"If she is so fascinated by 'R. H.,' " he said slowly, looking away from me, "I should think she would enjoy lunching with you."

"I think perhaps we exaggerated her fondness for 'R. H.,' " I answered.

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“Or, what’s more to the point, perhaps she did,” he suggested, this time meeting my eye squarely.

“I’m quite sure she did; also I think she is a bit hungry for a lunch, with her own husband!”

“I had an important engagement,” he said. “But I’ll telephone and break that.”

He twisted his head a bit to one side and twinkled his eyes at me.

“Quite a day for clearing up troubles, isn’t it, Gilbert? Next floor, you say? I’ll go up as soon as I telephone. No, I guess I’ll telephone afterwards. Thanks for the tip!”

He shook hands warmly.

Having disposed of my family, I went back to Gwenn and hers.

CHAPTER XVIII

GWENN EXPLAINS

UNTIL the end of the meal I behaved very patiently, talking with false sprightliness about many inconsequential things.

"When am I going to hear the story?" I finally demanded of Gwenn, in an undertone.

"How impatient you are!" she whispered.

"Oh, very!" I chuckled. "It's quite inspiring to take things on faith, but really, if the need for mystery is over I'd like to ask about fifty questions, just to satisfy an absorbing curiosity."

"If for no other reason?" she insinuated.

"And for other reasons," I assented.

"Perhaps," she said, to the others, "if I explain about Mr. Curlew now, you can vouch for the accuracy of the story. I'm sure Mr. Winston deserves an authenticated version."

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“Go ahead,” said Harbury. “We’ll back you up.”

Harbury and I lit cigars. Dorothy posed herself to her own satisfaction and Gwenn began her story after the accepted manner of fairy tales.

“Once upon a time there lived in a small town in Michigan two very good young girls named Dorothy and Gwenn Fenton and a very bad boy named James Curlew. Dorothy and James were a little older than Gwenn and paid very little attention to her, most of their attention being paid to each other. They were what would be called, inseparables, only, as they grew older, Dorothy became more and more good—”

“Don’t tease,” interrupted Dot.

“—and James became ‘worser and worser.’ He was called the bad boy of the town. He was never really bad and indeed had a most generous disposition. But he was always in mischief and always losing his temper in times of trouble, and breaking something, or hurt-

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ing somebody. So, as is sure to happen in a small town, his reputation was far worse than he deserved.

“After he had graduated from a big engineering school and done quite a little creditable work in his profession everyone supposed that he and Dorothy would marry. As a matter of fact they probably would have married—” Gwenn glanced maliciously at Harbury— “but Dorothy was afraid of him! She had learned to dread his tempers!”

“It was just a boy and girl affair anyhow,” interrupted Dorothy. “Only, Jim was the kind who never changed. He felt that after we grew up we must stick together just as we had as children. I was afraid of him—and then as I grew up I looked at things differently. I knew we weren’t really suited to each other. But Jim couldn’t believe it. He thought that the gossip and scandal about him had prejudiced me. I was foolish and didn’t dare to tell him right out so I talked about his making

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a name for himself first and all that sort of thing.”

“One autumn,” continued Gwenn, “Jim came home for a few weeks between a job he had just finished and one he expected to go out on. He was very cross at Dot and started trailing with the ‘gay’ crowd in town. Of course, it wasn’t really ‘gay’ but it shocked the town with its little escapades. In the ‘gang’ was Joe Denny, the teller in the bank, who was one of Jim’s old pals.

“Of course, the stories about Jim grew thick and fast. Some said he had made a pile of money and was throwing it away. Others said he was broke and was sponging on the rest.

“Then one night the bank was robbed. Joe Denny was immediately suspected, on account of these silly sprees in which he had taken part. Also circumstances indicated some accomplice in the bank. Joe was arrested and, to everyone’s surprise, refused to explain his whereabouts on the evening in question. Curlew was

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called in and he not only swore that he knew Joe was innocent but he also refused to detail his actions at the time of the robbery. The town immediately took sides but mostly against Jim and Joe. Soon there was talk of arresting Jim, although there was not a particle of evidence to connect him with the affair except his friendship with Joe and his refusal to talk. Jim announced publicly that if anybody tried to arrest him it would be the hardest job he had ever tackled. That didn't help. One night the sheriff heard some strange rumors and hurried out to Curlew's house. He lived with a married sister at the edge of town.

"They had a terrible row, which ended when the sheriff tried to arrest Jim. Jim hurt him badly with a fire-shaker and then, realizing the danger of his position, fled away from town, and in fact, as we afterwards learned, skipped the country by a boat from New Orleans. Of course, everyone thought immediately of Canada, so Jim, who never lacked brains, went just the other way.

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“Jim’s flight almost convicted Joe Denny, but after a long trial he was found ‘not guilty’ and about three years later the real robbers were caught in another job and the whole thing cleared up. The sheriff even admitted he had given a man of Jim’s temper great provocation and practically exonerated him. Then the truth about why Jim and Joe were silent came out and the sentiment of the town changed completely.

“I don’t remember all the details but some of the boys in the ‘gay’ crowd had been on some wild expedition that night with a few very nice girls. It was all probably innocent enough but exposure of it in connection with this sensational robbery would have held them up to the scorn of every gossip within a hundred miles. Jim Curlew and Joe Denny were just the kind of fellows who would go to jail before they’d bring disgrace on girls for whose actions they were responsible. The story never got out until one of the girls was married and told her husband.”

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“That wasn’t I,” said Dorothy, hastily, “I wasn’t on that expedition. Then, I wasn’t married until a year after the news got out. We were married secretly, Mr. Winston. You see every now and then I would get letters from Jim, mailed from somewhere where he wasn’t, telling me he would come back soon. I couldn’t write him how I felt. The night he left he ran up to my house and just said: ‘I’m skipping town, Dot. But I’m all right and I’ll come back. Wait for me.’

“I was all knocked in a heap and trying to get my breath, when he came running back, scowling dreadfully.

“‘You’ll stick by me, won’t you, Dot?’ he demanded.

“Of course, I was scared to death and said, ‘yes.’

“‘If I come back and find you married I’ll kill him!’ he said—‘and may be you, too!’ He looked as if he meant it!

“Shall I go on, Gwenn?” she asked.

Gwenn smiled and answered:

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“Yes, you tell your own romance.”

“Well, I had met Rex in Detroit,” said Dorothy. “And we had become engaged. Nobody at home knew anything about it. Father had died and Gwenn and I were left alone. Father had had an interest in the mills and some other investments, so we had enough to live on but no relatives left to keep us in the old place. Then I got a letter from Jim saying that he was coming home. Joe Denny had somehow let him know that everything was all right. I was in a panic.

“We talked it over with Rex and then Gwenn and I packed up quietly and sent all our things to Cleveland and after we arrived there we sent back a notice to the paper saying that we had gone to Cleveland to live. That was so as to leave a false trail for Jim to follow.

“From Cleveland we went right away to Detroit, where I was married. Gwenn stayed with us for a while, calling herself Miss Littlefield, so as not to have any casual mention of her name reach Jim. Then she went to Chicago.

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She was bound to do something, herself. No one back home knew a thing about us and my married name made me safe unless I actually met Jim on the street. Of course, I had to risk that, but it wasn't likely to happen.

"Really, Mr. Winston, you may think me a fool but if you had seen Jim's expression that last night I think you would have been scared, too!"

"I don't doubt it," I said, smiling. "I remember his expression the night he broke into my apartment and he looked 'murder', sure enough. By the way, how about the ring? I don't yet see why Curlew should have mistaken Gwenn for Mrs. Harbury since he knew you both so well."

"It was the ring that did it," explained Gwenn. "It was mother's and Dorothy had always worn it but when we were planning to escape from Jim she started to take it off."

"You see I might change my way of doing my hair, style of dress and such things," said Dorothy. "I was certain to grow older and

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perhaps heavier, so in time Jim wouldn't be sure of me—but the ring would always give me away."

"I thought it wouldn't do me any harm," continued Gwenn, "and, being mother's, I wanted to wear it. So I took it. Then, of course, Jim Curlew saw it through the porch window the night you rescued me. He probably couldn't see my face very well but could see the ring on my hand as it hung down over the chair arm."

"But," I persisted, "he should have known you at a glance in Winkler's."

"He was puzzled," said Gwenn. "Don't you remember? As a matter of fact I look more as Dorothy looked a few years ago than she does herself. You see she has grown stouter. I still do my hair the way she did then. We looked very much alike as little girls though she was older. But Curlew remembered her as she had been when he left her. Do you remember his surprise when he pulled off the ring? It had always stuck at the joint."

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"He used to pull it off to tease me," said Dot, with a simper.

"My joint is evidently a trifle smaller because it slipped right off my finger," reminded her sister. "That staggered him."

"Then he thought it over during the night and remembered about the little girl who fought the dog," I remarked, half aside to Gwenn.

"I don't see what that had to do with it," she said perplexedly.

Harbury took out a time-table and he and Dorothy began a low-voiced discussion of trains.

"I do," I whispered. "After all this mystery it's odd that I should be able to solve the last question."

"But it had nothing whatsoever to do with his troubles," she answered. "Unless he suddenly remembered something about how I looked, or—"

"It wasn't how you looked," I said, "he remembered how you acted. He remembered that there was a little girl who stood bravely in

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front of her scared older sister and fought for her. He saw that the little girl had done it again. And he suddenly realized that the older girl had always shrunk from danger. He realized—”

Reproving fingers were laid lightly across my mouth. There were very few people left in the dining room and the discreet waiter was facing away from us. I continued speaking through the pleasant barrier.

“So he said that I had shown better judgment than he in my pursuit of romance—better luck than judgment, I think, since I was so much—”

“In the dark?” she suggested.

“Exactly. It seems almost humiliating that one should blunder into such good fortune.”

“Still it took courage to blunder along—in the dark.”

She was very near to me and her gray eyes were very deep.

“Not much courage,” I answered, “just good eyesight.”

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Somehow my hand closed over hers. I leaned closer and her eyes grew deeper, as when a cloud passes over a sunny pool—

.

Harbury coughed correctively.

Confound the family!

“Just for that,” I announced, “you shall be really scandalized. We hereby declare ourselves a free and independent state! Witness our hand and seal!”

Dorothy and Rex were redder than we. But the declaration was a distinct success.

THE END

The following pages are devoted to comments on "The Shadow Men," an unusual book by the same author.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "IN THE DARK"

THE SHADOW MEN

By Donald Richberg

A modern romance that sparkles with wit and humor. It is the story of a scapegoat's struggle to evade apparent destiny, inspired by his love for a woman and aided by a loyal friend. Charming as a romance, the book compels serious consideration for its criticisms of commercial and legal ideals and practices. It is not a "muck-raking" book, but a story to hold the interest of every intelligent reader. Seldom does any novel receive such strong commendation as the following opinions on the book:

"A gripping piece of fiction, bordering on the human document."—*Book Review Digest*.

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"'The Shadow Men' is one of the really strong publications of recent days. It is worth while. It is interesting

even to absorption and its doctrines are wholesome."—*Charleston (S. C.) News*.

"If one is interested in the tale of how the great corporations protect themselves from the law by offering subordinates as a sacrifice, this story will be found extremely interesting. The breezy style of the author is sufficiently persuasive in the ironic quality of the narrative to give considerable pleasure and the inevitable undercurrent of love interest has been pleasantly varied in this novel to suit the jaded palate of modern fiction readers."—*Boston Herald*.

"Apart from the excellent execution of the underlying purpose of the book it possesses the interest of a dramatic tale well told."—*Brooklyn Eagle*.

"In many respects a remarkable book. . . . It will interest many and some will regard it as the worthiest novel that has appeared in many a day. It is a book of realities persistent and conflicting."—*Chicago Record-Herald*.

"A convincing story—very remarkable because of the direct and simple way it is told."—*Chicago Evening Post*.

"A big story. You will like this book. It is full of good stuff."—*Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

"The revelation is powerful and painful, and it is made in a way to enthrall the reader and hold him to the end. In other words, it is not a revelation merely, but an entrancing story exceptional in more senses than one. John Byford, the hero, is unusual. The situations are unusual

and the style very much so. There is a constant flow of wit and metaphor and there are flashes of psychological insight, but the one term that best characterizes the book is spontaneity. It comes of itself out of a full mind and heart."—*Boston Evening Transcript*.

"It is a record of shrewd, successful rascality and is invested with clean, ironic humor."—*Dallas News*.

"The trial scene, in which Byford's attorney piles up the baleful suggestion of the 'shadow men' who are the real criminals, is an admirable piece of writing. The characters are original and individual, and the 'Americanism' of the girl is well done. The revelation of constant compromise in business and professional life bears the earmarks of truth and the stamp of inner knowledge."—*New York Evening Post*.

"'The Shadow Men' cannot fail to interest. The tale contains enough truth to make it a startling eye-opener to the abuses inflicted by the 'shadow men.'"—*Newark Evening News*.

"A powerfully fashioned novel."—*Portland Oregonian*.

"A terrific arraignment of a 'man higher up.' The author has a terse and vigorous style."—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

"Occasionally a novel is written to which the enthusiastic reviewer's hackneyed phrase, 'Well worth reading,' is truly applicable. And this is the case with Donald Richberg's 'The Shadow Men'—a powerful story . . . by an author

possessed of that rare combination, ability to write and a thorough knowledge of what he is writing about. . . . It is a real human, breathing narrative."—*Philadelphia Press*.

"The book is entertaining, very."—*Spokane Spokesman-Review*.

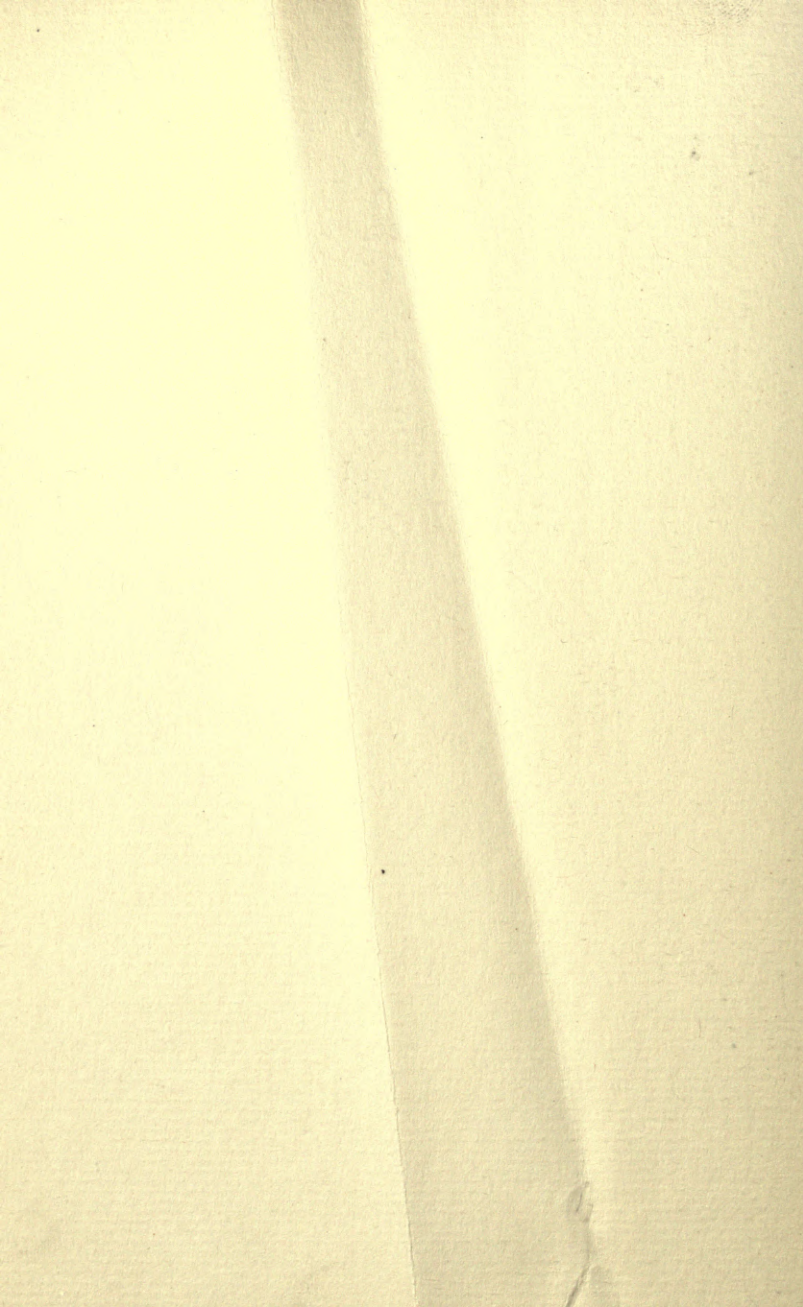
"A novel of firm, well-knit fiber, of intensity and the urge of higher business ideals. The characters are vital, living human beings, sternly in earnest, with a wide and sane vision of life and its fellowship obligations. There are some notably dramatic incidents, well handled, and the plot shows remarkable technical balance, a vigor of style and a seriousness of artistic as well as of ethical purpose. It has such a note of universal appeal as to lift it high above the light boudoir fiction of the day. There is charm as well as vigor in the author's terse, clean-cut literary style."—*The Chicago Daily News*.

"'The Shadow Men' is a story brilliantly written, with lots of life and 'go,' crowded with incidents, and sparkling with epigrams. It is not only an enthralling story, but it throws a strong beam of light into a little-understood department of modern iniquity. I hope that the book will attract attention, and wipe the scales from the eyes of the public."—*Professor E. A. Ross, University of Wisconsin, Author of "Sin and Society."*

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